



M & R

**A Regimental History
of the Sikh Light Infantry
1941–1947**



EDITED BY
J D Hookway

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Foreword to the Second Edition

by Lt Col D L Mackay RE (Retd)

President of the Sikh Pioneers and Sikh Light Infantry Association

With my own roots in the Sikh Pioneers, having been born in Sialkot in February 1933, just days before the Sikh Pioneers were disbanded, I count it a particular honour to be writing this foreword. My father regarded it the greatest privilege to have served with Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs. When two legends of those days, 'Prix' Price and 'Pumpus' Pearse, were asked to reform a new Regiment of infantry, they started with a wonderful tradition and the Regiment has gone from strength to strength.

Time takes its toll and few remain with first-hand knowledge of those stirring and historic times, which are remembered by the Regiment with such justifiable pride. John Dugdall Hookway died on 30th June 2005, and John Darwin Maling on 16th March 2009. But in recording these first six years of the Regiment they, and those others whose recollections helped so much, have performed an invaluable service. We can only deeply regret that that some are not now able to see the success of the First Edition and this requirement for a Second one. As we move forward in the age of communications, this Edition will be published on the Internet but with a limited number of copies for those who appreciate the feel of a book.

Unlike the Cheshire cat, fading away until only the grin remains, the Sikh Pioneers and Sikh Light Infantry Association continues to bring, at least for the present, pleasure and satisfaction to those who served at this time and their families who are proud to be connected.

Foreword to the First Edition

by Lt Col J D Maling, DSO, MC (Retd)
a founding member of the Regiment

It is an honour to be asked to write a foreword to the history of the raising and early deployment of the Mazhbi and Ramdasias Sikhs as an infantry regiment.

The regiment was raised in wartime in 1941 at a period of intense crisis and confusion. There were unusual difficulties to be faced on raising. There was no Training Centre, no pool of trained junior leaders, no established recruiting system. Army instructional manuals were of little use initially because only a handful of our intake of Mazhbi and Ramdasias Sikhs could read or write Roman Urdu.

The provision of weapons, equipment and housing of all kinds was so slow that much valuable training time had to be confined to elementary foot drill and outdoor classes teaching the three R's. It was something of a miracle that those problems were overcome in time for the regiment to make a genuine contribution to the Indian Army's war time effort.

The excellence of the Mazhbis and Ramdasias as soldiers in the old Sikh Pioneer regiments from 1857 to their disbandment in 1932, was well known to our first Commanding Officer, Colonel C H Price and our first Second-in-Command, Major E P F Pearse. They had experienced the joy and pride of serving with the Mazhbis and Ramdasias in the old Pioneer Regiments. They had also experienced the sorrow of the disbandment of the Pioneers in 1932. In 1941 these two officers were presented with the opportunity to help Mazhbis and Ramdasias regain their old position in the Indian Army. In 1941 it also presented a unique opportunity to

help the whole Mazhbi and Ramdasia community in the Punjab.

The enthusiasm of these two officers, revered by all who served with them, was an important element in the growth of the new regiment. I deeply regret that neither of those true friends of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia is alive today to read this Foreword.

The writing of a history of the regiment has been a long-felt need. The wide and permanent dispersal of all wartime officers after 1945 and the natural difficulties of access to records in India after Independence, have contributed to the delay.

We can be very grateful to Captain 'Hukm' Hookway for his determination to fill this gap. He has overcome obstacles of distance and time in his collection and collation of information about the regiment. His history is the first such record available, outside India, to historians and libraries. The publication of this book will enable the families and descendants of those who served in the Sikh Light Infantry to have a clearer understanding of the endeavours and sacrifices of those early tumultuous years.

I am sure that all those who shared in the struggle to bring the regiment through its birth pangs will be proud of what they helped to achieve. Today the splendid Sikh Light Infantry, with its many battalions, is a respected and successful regiment playing a full part in the defence of India.

Prologue

This History of the Sikh Light Infantry, from its re-birth in 1941 as the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment to Independence in 1947, should have been written at least twenty, if not thirty years ago. Had the opportunity been taken then, most of the participants would have been alive, and able to contribute at first hand. Doubtless many interesting and amusing episodes have been lost beyond recall, but it is precisely this point that makes it essential to do the best job possible *now*.

There is no way in which this record can be further delayed, without being totally impossible to complete; time lost can never be made up. And it is important to the Regiment, if not to a wider public, that the formative years of the Regiment are available, in print, for later members of our very select band to read and study. For men worked, and fought and died for the Regiment, and we owe it to them to chronicle their deeds and those of their comrades.

I have taken the view that, for a small Regiment and over a short period of some six years, it is quite permissible to include the odd anecdote or story. These illustrate chiefly those who survive and/or those willing to put pen to paper: many units are poorly served in this respect, but that is unavoidable.

One other point. The History deals almost entirely with officers, and with the employment of the various units. The ordinary IOR gets hardly a mention ... yet we all know that the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs are the main characters in this story, for without them nothing could have been achieved. As was said '*Jo hoega, hoega*' or 'What Mazhbi, Mazhbi'. The mistakes, omissions and, in

Prologue

many cases, the opinions are mine and I must stand or fall by them. It has been a very frustrating yet rewarding process, and it is pleasing to hear that the Official Regimental History covering the period 1857 to date has just been published in India. This is in no way to be taken as a competing History: rather it chronicles the re-employment of Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs and their service prior to Indian Independence.

The History since Independence is a matter for the Regiment, and former British officers are most grateful for the close contacts which have been maintained over the past fifty years. We are also very proud indeed of the growth and successes achieved since 1947, and especially the appointment in 1997 of the Colonel of the Regiment, Gen Ved Malik, PVSM, AVSM, ADC as Chief of Army Staff. Who could possibly have thought such a thing possible in 1941, or even in 1947?

The continuing factor is the men: the brave, loyal and friendly M and R Sikhs. Long may they and the Regiment prosper.

Deg Teg Fateh.

(the post-Independence motto of the Regiment)

The full meaning is: 'We all wish at all times for our victory in War, which is the victory of our sword, and also our economic prosperity in peace and war — more food, better standard of living and all other riches for our country.'

Acknowledgements

My main thanks must go to the one surviving founder-member of the Regiment, Lt Col J D Maling, DSO, MC, now living in New Zealand. He was in at the very first, commanded the only M & R Battalion to see action in the Second World War, and made detailed notes and kept many original papers very shortly after the events described. In fact there was a good deal more than could be included in this History, and it is hoped to keep all these papers together and available for further study. His interest in the project and his willingness to correct mistakes and fill omissions has been crucial.

The second main source of information was the letter from Col C H Price (late 32 Sikh Pioneers) written shortly after the end of the War in January 1947. This gave an overview of the traumatic days during which the M & R Sikh Regiment was raised from virtually nothing, and of the subsequent expansion and renaming of the Regiment. It also included the roles of the various Battalions and Garrison Companies in the period up to Independence.

A number of other officers have contributed details from their own experiences, notably Maj P Petherbridge for the 3rd Bn and Capt D R Casselle for the 25th Garrison Bn. Capt H C T Routley has provided much information on the Training Bn, later the Regimental Centre, and this has helped to keep track of units and officers. Many other officers have been good enough to complete a questionnaire sent out a few months ago, and these replies have helped to fill in some gaps ... and also to raise some queries.

I am indebted to Capt Routley for the maps which appear in this

Acknowledgements

History. They cover the sub-continent of India, and show where the main places mentioned in the text were located, Burma and the area around Meiktila where the 1st Bn fought an epic series of battles, and the Middle East, where the 2nd Bn was responsible for huge areas of both Syria and Iraq.

Finally, Dr Robin Rees, son of the late Capt Douglas Rees (34 Royal Sikh Pioneers), has been of the greatest possible help in the preparation of text and illustrations for this History. His father wrote a most interesting account of his own service with the Sikh Pioneers shortly after the First World War, and it is nice to think that his son has, in his own way, helped to get another episode in the history of the Mazhbi and Ramdasias Sikhs into print.

My own role has been largely to collect, sort and reproduce the work of others: my main regret is that it was left until so long after the events recorded. But it is now in print, and I hope that readers in the future will spare a thought for those gallant men from the Punjab who, over nearly one and a half centuries, have been true to their salt, and who still serve their great country with distinction.

*Beckington, Bath
August 1998*

The Sikh Pioneers and Sikh Light Infantry Association is extremely grateful to Mrs Janet Hookway for her kind permission to produce this Second Edition of *M & R*, her late husband's history of the Regiment in its early days.

March 2011

Glossary of abbreviations

The military are much given to the use of abbreviations, for many purposes, and this may make it difficult for non-military readers. Only the main abbreviations are given in this brief summary and modern notations have been used, not always the same as at the time of the events recorded.

Ranks

King's Commissioned Officers (KCOs)

2Lt	Second Lieutenant	Col	Colonel
Lt	Lieutenant	Brig	Brigadier
Capt	Captain	Maj Gen	Major General
Maj	Major	Lt Gen	Lieutenant General
Lt Col	Lieutenant Colonel	FM	Field Marshal

Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs)

Jem	Jemadar	often platoon commander, no British equivalent
Sub	Subadar	often Coy 2 i/c, no British equivalent
Sub Maj	Subadar Major	senior Indian VCO, no British equivalent

(Indian units, especially Infantry battalions, typically had 12–18 KCOs, far fewer than a British Infantry battalion. This would be made up by some 20–30 VCOs.)

Glossary of abbreviations

*Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs)
and Indian Other Ranks (IORs)*

Sep	Sepoy	Private
L Nk	Lance Naik	Lance Corporal
Nk	Naik	Corporal
Hav	Havildar	Sergeant

Appointments

CO	Commanding Officer	QM	Quartermaster
2 ic	Second-in-Command	IO	Intelligence Officer
Adjt	Adjutant		

Formations

Sec	section	approx 8–10 men
Pl	platoon	approx 30–40 men
Coy	company	approx 100–150 men
Bn	battalion	approx 700–850 men
Bde	brigade	approx 4,000 men
Div	division	approx 15,000 men

I must apologise for any inconsistencies in the use of these abbreviations.

The Disbanding of the Corps of Sikh Pioneers

The disbanding of the Corps of Sikh Pioneers is covered in the definitive *History of the Sikh Pioneers* by Lt Gen Sir George MacMunn, but before embarking on the Regimental History of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment, its lineal descendant, some few extra words should be added.

The Sikh Pioneers were the main, in fact almost the only unit in the Indian Army to offer the opportunity of service to the Mazhbi and Ramdasia classes of Sikhs. A small number served in the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, but that was about it. The M & Rs, as they were affectionately called, were held to be lower-class Sikhs by the bulk of the Sikhs in India, and were, for example, not allowed to worship in public *Gurdwaras*. It was only by military service, effectively in the Sikh Pioneers, that such men could progress in the world and, more importantly, in their villages.

The Pioneer Regiments in the Indian Army all suffered in the reorganisation of 1932–3; the units involved were the Madras Pioneers, formed in 1758, the Bombay Pioneers in 1777, the Sikh Pioneers in 1857 and the Hazara Pioneers in about 1905. They were particularly useful for road-making and similar duties on punitive operations, such as on the North-West Frontier. But this role was coming to an end in the 1930s, and permanent roads were replacing tracks or even no roads at all. At the same time the need to reduce expenditure and to get maximum efficiency was paramount. So, partly to standardise the organisation of Engineer troops in a Division, it was decided that the Pioneers would have to go. They had

since their formation combined the dual roles of infantry and technical troops, but their organisation and training was not sufficient to meet modern conditions and become Sappers. Similarly, it was not thought that they could be converted to infantry, given the financial constraints.

So under the reorganisation, the strengths of Field Companies of Sappers and Miners were increased by some 30 to 35%, and the reinforcements for this would come from the disbanded Pioneer units. But this raised peculiar problems for the Sikh Pioneers. The Bengal Sappers and Miners and the Bombay Sappers and Miners were both allocated some 320 Mazhbi and Ramdasias Sikhs from the Sikh Pioneers. The founder of Sikhism had intended that there should be no discrimination on the grounds of religion, caste or class, but this did not stand up in practice. The caste system persisted, and there were many social grades of Sikhs. At the top were the Jats: the Lobanas, Ramdasias and Mazhbis were amongst those lower down. These latter had given good service for eighty years, without caste coming into question, but they had been mixed only with Ramdasias and not with Jat Sikhs. It was recommended that the Bengal Corps should enlist only Jats and the Bombay Corps only Lobanas, Ramdasias and Mazhbis.

Unfortunately this advice was not heeded, on the grounds that any Sikh should be able to command any other Sikh, and so M & Rs were transferred to the Bengal Sappers and Miners, to serve with Jat Sikhs. Everything possible was done to make a success of these arrangements, but difficulties were encountered in the *Gurdwara* (temple), and led eventually to more serious trouble. Early in 1933 it was decided to go back to the original proposals; all Jat Sikhs transferred to the Bengal Sappers and Miners, and all Lobana, Ramdasias and Mazhbi Sikhs to the Bombay Sappers and Miners. Subsequently, the Lobana Sikhs were allocated to the Indian Machine Gun platoons of British Infantry regiments and by mid-1933 everyone had settled down in their new units. But only a

small number of M & R Sikhs had this opportunity for service, and their own Corps had gone, apparently for good.

So the disbandment had the effect of penalising the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs, and although every effort was made to soften the blow, a severe blow it undoubtedly was. As Gen MacMunn ends his *History*, '*Morituri te salutant.*' (Those about to die salute you.)

The British officers of the Corps, very sorrowfully as many have in later years described, were posted away to other Regiments where, in the fullness of time, they met the challenges of war in many theatres. The few, lucky VCOs and IORs were transferred to the Sappers and Miners, but the greater number were demobilised to their villages, to try to take up civilian employment. No doubt they remembered the friendship and comradeship of the Corps, but must have thought that that was gone for ever.

Not so! The qualities of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs, which had made the old Pioneers famous from China to Abyssinia, from Tibet to France and above all on the Frontier, were not forgotten in the dark and threatening days of mid-1941. Ex-Pioneer officers, many now in high places, recollected the bravery and endurance of the Pioneers and suggested that as a 'martial class' they should again be able to serve King-Emperor and Country. The gap since December 1932 and disbandment had been long, but not fatally so. There still were VCOs and other ranks of the Pioneers fit and able to serve, and the story of how they, and a very small number of ex-British officers of the Sikh Pioneers re-raised the Corps as infantry is the subject of this Regimental History.

For the continuity of service, although terribly weakened, was not totally lost, and so the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment, later to be renamed the Sikh Light Infantry, carried the authentic Pioneer training and outlook as well as the traditions of those glorious forebears.

The Raising of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment

This chapter deals with the raising of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalions, also the 25th and 26th Garrison Battalions, three Garrison Companies and the Training Battalion, eventually to become the Regimental Centre, and with the early days of each of these units.

2.1 The Formation of the 1st Bn Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment

Jullundur: 1st October 1941 – 15th March 1942

The Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment was raised on the 1st October 1941 at Jullundur, the authority being Indian Army Order No. 1015 of the 13th September 1941.

Two former Sikh Pioneer officers, Lt Col C H Price ('Prix', 32 SP) and Maj E P F Pearse ('Pumpus', 34 RSP) were called from their Battalions in the 12 FFR and 2 Punjab in Malaya to be respectively CO and 2i/c. Capt J D Maling, MC (1/11 Sikhs) came from his unit on the North West Frontier, to be Adjutant. It was during the hot weather, and the three officers met together for the first time in Chamiers Hotel in Jullundur. Price and Pearse had been old friends from Sikh Pioneer days; both were tremendous admirers of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs and were filled with an infectious enthusiasm at being given the opportunity of bringing the descendants of the Sikh Pioneers back into the Army as infantry.

Col Price started that first meeting by announcing that he had

opened two files for the new Regiment whilst he was flying from his old Battalion in Malaya. He apologised for the file covers saying that the only material available to him for this purpose had been pages of a publication called *Tit-Bits* which he had picked up in the aircraft. At this stage he produced what he called the 'policeman file' with a cover picture of a policeman pursuing a malefactor and which contained the GHQ instructions for raising the Regiment, and then the 'naked girl file' with a cover needing no further description, which contained the Admin instructions.

GHQ's instructions said that the Regiment would be raised on 1st October 1941 with the title of 1st Bn Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment. It would be made up initially of the three regular officers present, a handful of recalled ex-Sikh Pioneer pensioned Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs), one 3rd-grade clerk and some five hundred Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh territorials. GHQ also instructed the battalion to do its own recruiting from the Punjab, and to do its own recruit training with the intention of expanding to more battalions if the recruiting and training were successful.

On 1st October 2 Lt Ranjit Singh (from 15 Punjab ITF) was appointed officiating Quartermaster. An advance party of 2 VCOs and 23 Indian Other Ranks (IORs) from 15 Punjab Regiment at Jhansi and 15 IORs from 17 Dogra Regiment at Allahabad, commenced erecting tents to form a standing camp. Sub Maj Jiwan Singh was i/c the advance party.

On the 4th October the main body of the draft from 9/15 Punjab Regiment arrived: it consisted of 5 VCOs, 367 IORs and 18 followers. Construction of a sports ground was begun, but office work was held up as no clerk was available. A 3rd-grade clerk came from Jhansi the same day, but was remembered by Col Price as 'very bad'. The next day the main body of the draft from 7/17 Dogra Regiment arrived by train from Allahabad; there were 3 VCOs, 173 IORs and 8 followers. The 9/15 Punjabis and 7/17

Dogra had only been embodied a month or so before, so the troops were little better than recruits. Under the Admin instructions the Regiment was to be attached to the Dogra Regimental Centre in Jullundur for rations and accommodation. Rations and stores became the responsibility of the Regiment when 2 Lt Ranjit Singh arrived from 15 Punjab Regt ITF (Indian Territorial Force). The accommodation consisted of five *kachcha* barracks for recruits, stores and messes. The Battalion offices were in four or five EPIP tents with one telephone which sometimes worked. All ranks except recruits were in tents, but the three regular officers were soon established in 'Wana huts' (mud walls and EPIP tops) which were beautifully constructed, complete with fireplaces and chimneys, under the guidance of our old Pioneer experts. The Battalion was organised into four Rifle Companies and HQ Company. HQ Company temporarily consisted of signallers, recruit instructors, orderlies and other employed men, as there were no means of selecting specialists at that early stage. All platoons were to be of mixed Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs. The Company Commanders were ex-Sikh Pioneer VCOs:

Sub Maj Jiwan Singh (32 SP)

Sub Mit Singh, IDSM (23 SP) (His first campaign medal was 1903 Tibet, and he was on the Younghusband expedition to Lhasa.)

Sub Puran Singh (32 SP)

Sub Mukand Singh (34 RSP)

Sub Hazura Singh (32 SP)

The new recruits must have wondered at the bedlam surrounding Battalion HQ. Several times a day Maj Pearse's bull terrier would invade the area in hot pursuit of stray cats. The decisive engagement would take place between the two flies of the office tent's roofs and the sounds of these out-of-sight conflicts had to be heard to be believed. Added to this were the sounds of the frustrated Adjutant or Quartermaster dealing with a recalcitrant

telephone, and trying to out-shout the cats and dogs. This may have been good battle training for the recruits, but led eventually to an attached officer suffering from battle fatigue and his replacement had to be found from the young officers who soon arrived to join the battalion.

Training gradually got under way. There was a North West India Defence scheme which ran from 7th to 14th October: the lines were blacked-out, and the Bn had to find one platoon to guard Area Headquarters and two platoons for inlying piquets for the defence of the lines. The only weapons available were bamboo mosquito-net poles! The Regiment very quickly came to the notice of the Area Commander when one of the Bn's roadblocks, with orders to check the identities of all road users, had to take positive action to stop a car which did not pull up quickly enough. In a nice show of aggression the car's headlights were smashed with the bamboo poles — and the car's passenger was identified as the Area Commander! When he had recovered his equilibrium he turned out to be distinctly human, and became one of the Regiment's earliest admirers and was very helpful during the stay in Jullundur.

On 16th October individual training began; prior to that PT and drill were carried out by companies. Cadres for recruit instructors, VCOs and havildars were started and the first recruits began to arrive. There were ten from Jhansi with one month's service and five more joined from Jullundur with no training.

The only vehicle in the lines for the first few weeks was Capt Maling's private car, but even this decrepit conveyance came to a quick end when his orderly tried his hand at driving. The officers then graduated to bicycles, and camel transport was provided by the Dogras, but it was not long before the battalion received six magnificent old civilian buses for driver training. Each of the buses had done at least ten years' hard labour before coming to the Bn and, after experiencing our recruit drivers, they spent most of their time immobile.

Mercifully the Bn was accommodated in an area which was isolated from the Dogra Regimental Centre, so it could be as unorthodox as it liked, and it had to be unorthodox to survive. GHQ gave the impression of having forgotten that it had raised the Regiment or why. The excitement of receiving the first consignment of stores and equipment was tremendous. Col Price himself opened the first case whilst Sub Maj Jiwan Singh pulled off the lid to disclose thirty *Handbooks on Gurkhas* and ten buckshot rifles (*chowkidar* variety). No ammunition was ever received for the buckshot rifles, but the Bn was deluged with .22 calibre ammunition without the .22 rifles.

But things were beginning to move. Early in November ten hired lorries were received and the training of thirteen MT drivers began. Four NCOs arrived on transfer from 26 Garrison Company, and four LMGs came, enabling an LMG cadre of 12 NCOs and 12 sepoy to begin. 2 Lt Ranjit Singh was commissioned as an ECO (Emergency Commissioned Officer) and Hav Indar Singh was promoted to be Jem Head Clerk. On 20th November two 3" mortars were received, but unfortunately no instructors were available for mortar training. These were quite unexpected, as they were hardly basic training weapons in those days when they were just being issued to fully trained units waiting to go overseas. Web equipment was not available, but some old leather equipment was issued.

At the end of November the first rifles were received: 106 service models plus 24 dummy LMGs. Early in December the first promotions were able to be made: 19 naiks were promoted to havildar and 17 lance-naiks to naiks. A further 100 service rifles were made available, and on 10th December the Bn was visited by Lt Gen Hartley, GOC Northern District and Maj Gen Hickman, Comd Lahore District. Two days later 2 Lt Gurdial Singh arrived from 17 Dogra Regt ITF, and two weeks later he was taking the first cadre for Tommy gun (Thompson sub-machine gun) and 3" mortar. Eight revolvers were also received.

The first firing practices were done with six air rifles purchased in the bazaar. After the .303 and .22 rifles eventually arrived the air rifles continued in use, mostly for teaching fire orders. Coloured darts were fired at landscape targets, with a different colour for each rifleman so that the instructor could tell which rifleman did not know the difference between the 'bushy top tree' at ten o'clock and the one at four o'clock. The Bn probably became the greatest consumers of landscape targets in the Indian Army's experience.

These same air rifles were used in a popular training exercise where six men would be sent off separately for an hour or two, each with a rifle and ten pellets. A prize would be given to the man bringing back the biggest or heaviest victim of his shooting. It was sometimes necessary for the Adjutant to have to drop out of hectic volleyball matches in order to judge what the happy and triumphant snipers brought back — usually birds of all descriptions. There was always the slight worry that someone might come back with the Area Commander in his bag!

Early in January 1942 Lt K N Young arrived from 4/9 Jat Regiment, followed by 2 Lts J W Warner and F N Draper straight from the UK. Later in the month the latter two went off to OTS, Bangalore for a two-month course. A further 206 service rifles were received on 20th January, making the total held by the Bn 412. At the end of January the strength of the Regiment was: 8 BOs, 12 VCOs, 34 havildars, 6 L/havildars, 38 naiks and 740 IORs — total 838.

In February letters were sent to the Recruiting Officers at Jullundur and Lahore for the enrolment of 210 more recruits. Four havildars were promoted to Jems and 2 Lt D J Ewert arrived, followed a week later by 2 Lt J G Slater-Hunt. The strength of the Regiment then was: 11 BOs, 16 VCOs, 31 havildars, 45 naiks and 780 IORs — total 883.

Early in March Capt C R Toby (Brit Ser Attd) arrived from OTS, Bangalore, and the Establishment Table for a Training

Company and a date for raising it was received. Nine hired lorries were returned to Messrs Pertap Chand and Co (presumably the tenth had been 'written off').

One of the first duties for the Adjutant was to convene a meeting of senior VCOs to decide on the Regimental badge. He was wearing his 1/11 Sikh cap badge of a quoit surmounted by Prince-of-Wales feathers in those days, and told the committee that Col Price wanted a more warlike symbol than feathers. The Committee then decided on the representation of two traditional Sikh weapons, the *chakra* or quoit surmounted by a *kirpan* or sword, and was drawn-up by Audrey Hungerford-Jackson, the artist daughter of an ICS officer, who was serving with the WAC(I). A proof copy was drawn for submission to GHQ, where it was approved without question, subject to the final approval of HM the King. The Regiment did not have any say about the shoulder titles which soon arrived in the rather badly produced cloth form of 'M & R Sikhs'.

Those early days in the M & R Sikhs were very happy ones. Col Price and Maj Pearse truly loved being back with the men they had known in the Pioneer Regiments. The Regiment had received a hard core of tremendous characters in the ex-Sikh Pioneer VCOs. The younger VCOs and NCOs were filled with the same dedication to soldiering as the older ones and they all shared a marvellous sense of humour. This dedication and sense of humour infected everyone from the Commanding Officer downwards and enabled the Regiment to go from strength to strength despite all difficulties. The Adjutant, Capt J D Maling later wrote:

For myself, I look on my years with the M & Rs as the most rewarding in my army career and I am grateful that I was given the opportunity of serving with such magnificent men from their raising to their first battles.

On 15th March 1942 the Bn moved from Jullundur to Multan Cantt, after a stay of five and a half months.

Multan: 16th March 1942 – 10/11th April 1942

The Regiment left Jullundur on the afternoon of 15th March and arrived at Multan early in the morning of the 16th. Shortly thereafter 2 Lts Hunt and Morrison went on courses to the Infantry School, British Wing, Saugor and 2 Lt Ewert to Fighting Vehicles School at Ahmednagar.

On 27th March Hony Lt Mall Singh (SP) was re-employed in the Training Company, and on the next day Sub Maj Jiwan Singh, Sardar Bahadur was presented with the OBI medal. At the end of the month the strength of the Regiment was: 23 BOs, 16 VCOs, 43 havildars, 49 naiks and 892 IORs — total 1,000.

On 2nd April an Advance Party left for Peshawar. Officers continued to arrive, or return from courses:

2 Lt F W Draper	back from OTS, Bangalore
Lt T L Megoram	arrived from IMA, Dehra Dun, DLI
Lt D L Blois	arrived from OTS, Mhow
Capt J J Kerr	from OTS, Bangalore
2 Lt J B Crosthwaite	from OTS, Mhow, Border Regt
2 Lt J F D Browne	from IMA, Dehra Dun, British Service
Capt W H P Hill	from OTS, Bangalore, Q Royal West Kent
2 Lt H H Blezard	from IMA, Dehra Dun, Green Howards
Lt H. Whitmore	from OTS, Mhow, British service
2 Lt J A Hett	from IMA, Dehra Dun, British service
2 Lt J E Savage	from IMA, Dehra Dun, British service
2 Lt Gurdip Singh Dhillon	from IMA, Dehra Dun

All the above arrivals took place between 4th and 9th April 1942, making it a very busy few days for all concerned. In addition, four VCOs were sent on a Platoon Commanders' course at Kakul, and ten NCOs to the Infantry School at Saugor.

Col Price later wrote of this period, with feeling:

Our principal difficulty now and throughout our existence was the production of leaders, for we had nothing between

the Sikh Pioneer VCOs, the majority of whom were ‘past it’ and our own production, of very limited service. However, I should like to place on record that there were some of these old VCOs who formed a bed rock and without their aid I doubt if we could have been raised. I wish there could have been more, for it only worked out at about one or two per battalion. The gap between the disbandment of the Sikh Pioneers and our raising was very sorely felt.

Maj Watkin reports that at this time he was in a rifle company commanded by Capt Peter Hill. The company Sub was Mit Singh, IDSM, much decorated, whose first medal was 1903 Tibet! He had been with Younghusband to Lhasa.

Peshawar: 10/11th April 1942 – July 1943

The remainder of the Regiment moved from Multan to Peshawar in two trains, leaving Multan at 2330 hrs on 10th and 0330 hrs on 11th April, and arriving at Peshawar at 0330 and 0630 hrs on 12th April respectively.

More training followed. Forty NCOs went on courses to the Infantry School, Saugor, and Maj E P F Pearse went on a course at the Frontier Warfare School, Kakul. The Regiment was also visited soon after its arrival by Brig E V R Bellers, Comd Peshawar Bde and Maj Gen R Denning, Comd Peshawar Dist.

At the end of April 1942, after seven months of existence, the strength of the Regiment was: 31 BOs, 19 VCOs, 64 havildars, 61 naiks and 910 IORs (including recruits), plus 42 boys — total 1,127.

Then, on 1st May, Lt Col T M Ker (34 RSP) arrived from 11 Sikh Regiment as Comdt designate for a new 2nd Battalion.

Further officer arrivals in early May were 2 Lts D Nesteroff and R P Watkin, both from OTS, Mhow, after being commissioned in the UK. Capt J J Kerr left the Regiment to be Admin. Officer, CDRE, Rawalpindi. Training continued with the annual classification of signallers, and 1 BO, 1 VCO and 19 IORs went on a course to G(R) Warfare Training, Charat. 2 Lt R F Day arrived from OTS,

Mhow and 2 Lt D J Ewert returned from Fighting Vehicles School, Ahmednagar.

On 15th May it was advised that a 2nd Bn would be raised on War Establishment and Field Accounting System. At the end of the month two VCOs and two IORs returned from instruction in 18 pdr field gun at Nowshera, and the strength of the Regiment was: 30 BOs, 23 VCOs, 61 havildars, 68 naiks and 982 IORs, plus 70 boys — total 1,239.

In early June 1 VCO and 9 IORs went to Bara Fort (2/2 Punjab) for training in MMG, and Capt Mohinder Singh MC arrived from 4/11 Sikh Regiment. Hav-clerk Wariam Singh also arrived from 11 Sikhs. On 13th June an Attestation Parade was held for the first group of recruits to join the 1st Bn. Soldiers were listed as Recruits i.e. Rect Fauja Singh, until attested.

Later in the month three VCOs arrived on transfer from Auxiliary Pioneer and Garrison Company, Aurangabad after service in the Middle East. Three more VCOs from the same source joined at the end of the month, as did Lts I O Arthur and V C M Williams and 2 Lt R D Ballentine, all from OTS, Bangalore. Lt J R Ross returned from Fighting Vehicles School course, and the last arrivals in June were A/Capt C G Mitchell and T/Capt A D Barnett, both from OTS, Bangalore.

On the same day the 1st Bn became Duty Bn, Peshawar, after nine months of existence; and Roman Urdu classes for BOs started the next day. There can have been very little time available for formal language study in those busy nine months! Further officer arrivals in July were 2 Lt B E Kew, Lt B S Drewe and later 2 Lt Ghukor Singh, from OTS, Mhow. A Ceremonial occasion on 11th July saw HRH the Duke of Gloucester inspect a Bn guard at Government House, and a representative detachment of all officers and 60 IORs.

The Bn had to find a Demonstration Company for the Frontier Warfare School at Kakul: this consisted of 2 BOs, 3 VCOs and 123

IORs, plus 11 followers. Throughout July, small drafts of approximately nine recruits at a time were being sent to the 2nd Bn at Multan.

The Indian Army List for July 1942 shows the officer and Sub Maj names at about this period (see Appendix A).

At the beginning of August there was a Brigade exercise involving the Bn, and orders were received for Maj E P F Pearse to go to 13 Pioneer Bn, Indian Engineer Group at Sialkot as CO with effect from 15th August, on its conversion to 3rd Battalion Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment. This battalion had been raised by Lt Col S A (Bill) Bowden, (32 Sikh Pioneers). A further ten NCOs from the Auxiliary Pioneer Corps Depot at Aurangabad were received. Another officer joined the 1st Bn during August, 2 Lt Munshi Singh Brar and drafts of 60 and 130 recruits arrived from the 2nd Bn in Multan.

On 1st September Capt J D Maling arrived back from the 2nd Bn, where he had acted as Adjutant for the first two months following its raising on 1st July.

He then took over as 2i/c 1st Bn, replacing Maj E P F Pearse who had left to raise the 3rd Bn. A Battalion parade was held, and a Brigade exercise followed. Two more officers reported; 2 Lt H Whitaker, British service from IMA, Dehra Dun and Lt J D Worne.

The first birthday of the Regiment was celebrated on 1st October 1942. The year had been one of continuous expansion, and the raising of two Battalions from an almost non-existent pool of leaders. It was a year of non-stop training and of tremendous stress for the very small number of qualified instructors. This was also the third station the Regiment had occupied in the space of twelve months, not the best of situations in which to carry out training.

On 7th October 2 Lts J Morrison and B E Kerr were transferred to 25 (Garrison) Bn, M & R Sikh Regiment, and on 28th October HM the King approved the design of the Regimental badge for adoption by the M & R Sikh Regiment [see MGO/CG1, GHQ(9),

New Delhi, letter No. 27119/II/ CGr(2) of 22.10.42]. For most of the first year of the 1st Battalion's existence, the officers and senior VCOs were:

CO	Lt Col C H Price (32 SP)	
2i/c	Maj E P F Pearse (34 RSP)	
	Capt J D Maling, MC	from Sept. 1942
Adjutant	Capt J D Maling, MC	
Quartermaster	2 Lt Ranjit Singh	
	Capt H Whitmore	British service
Company	Sub Maj Jiwan Singh (32 SP)	
Commanders	Sub Mit Singh, IDSM (23 SP)	to 2nd Bn
(initially)	Sub Puran Singh (32 SP)	became Sub Maj 1st Bn
	Sub Mukand Singh (34 RSP)	
	Sub Hazura Singh (32 SP)	to 2nd Bn
Company	Lt D J Ewert	
Commanders	Capt K N Young	
	Lt J W Warner (Boys Coy)	
	Capt C R Toby	
	Capt J Worne	
	Capt Mohinder Singh, MC	later 2 i/c Trg Bn
Sub Maj	Sub Maj Jiwan Singh Bahadur, OBI	

Fort Salop, Kajuri Plain: July – October 1943

In July 1943 the Battalion moved to Fort Salop, some twenty miles West of Peshawar, on the Kajuri Plain as a Frontier Role Bn, staying there until October when they marched to a new station at Wah.

Wah: October 1943 – February 1944

At Wah the Battalion joined 3rd Brigade (Frontier Defence Reserve). The principal officers at that time were:

CO	Lt Col C H Price
2 i/c	Maj J D Maling, MC
Company	Maj J Worne
Commanders	Maj G Cambell-Austin
	Maj C R Toby
	Capt J W Warner
	Capt D J Ewert

Wah is 26 miles from Rawalpindi. It provided good training areas for both mountain and open warfare exercises with easy access to field-firing areas. Accommodation for all ranks was reasonably good and the Punjab was within easy reach for leave parties.

In February 1944 the battalion was suddenly ordered to send all men on leave pending a unit move to a Jungle Training School, followed by a move to Burma. At the same time orders were received for Col Price to take over command of an extended Training Centre for the M & R Sikh Regiment at Bareilly. He was to hand over command of the battalion, at Wah, by March to Lt Col G D Staveley-Jones of 2 Punjab Regiment.

The change of command was an occasion for sadness for both Col Price and all ranks of the battalion he had raised. But the extended Regiment was to gain greatly from having him at the Centre.

2.2 The Formation of the 2nd Bn Mazbhi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment

Multan: 1st July 1942 – Early 1943

It will be remembered that Lt Col T M Ker (34 RSP) had arrived at the 1st Bn in Peshawar from 11 Sikh Regiment as Comdt-designate of a new 2nd Battalion, and on 1st June 1942 the 2nd Bn M & R Sikh Regiment came into being at Multan. There is an interesting

query here, as the Indian Army List for July 1942 lists the raising of the 2nd Bn and the appointment of Lt Col Ker to command as being 1st May 1942, and at Peshawar Cantt. This certainly was the date on which Lt Col Ker arrived at Peshawar, but the actual date of the transfer of 17 BOs, 728 all ranks and 52 followers was 1st July 1942.

The main appointments were:

CO	Lt Col T M Ker (34 RSP)	from 11 Sikh Regt
2i/c	Maj R Sangster	from 12 FF Regt
Adjutant	Capt J D Maling	(Jul./Aug.)
	Capt T L Megoram	from DLI

Company Commanders	Capt W H P Hill	from Q Royal West Kents
	Capt H H Blezard	from Green Howards
	Capt K N Young	from 9 Jat Regt
Other officers	Lt J B Crosthwaite	Border Regt
	Lt R P Watkin	
	Lt S Cohen	
	Lt Day	
	Lt F Hepworth	from Irish Guards
	Lt O Rocyn-Jones	
	Lt E J Savage	
Sub Maj	Sub Maj Mall Singh	

In August it was intimated that the 3rd Battalion M & R Sikh Regiment would probably move to Multan as soon as possible, and continue raising alongside the 2nd Bn. Some 200 recruits were transferred to the 1st Bn early in August, in view of the very difficult situation in Multan. The accommodation necessary was lacking: the Bn was housed in barracks designed to hold 500 and in the height of the hot weather they were about 1,200-strong. The

climate was described by Lt Col Price as ‘the vile hot weather climate of Multan’ and, due to this and the poor accommodation, ‘desertions amongst the recruits were frequent and hardly to be wondered at with the conditions prevailing.’

Three ECOs were posted to the Bn from OTS, Bangalore (2 Lts Gurpartap Singh, Raghubir Singh Brar and Joginder Singh Dhillon). The Bn was visited by the ADMS Rawalpindi District and a week later by the GOC Rawalpindi District. Recruiting officers were instructed to stop recruiting for the Bn. The strength of the Battalion as at 31st August 1942 was: 18 BOs, 14 VCOs, 108 IORs (trained), 910 recruits and 74 boys — total 1,224.

It is not clear just how trained the IORs were. Maj Watkin comments ‘preponderantly totally untrained’, as training facilities were poor, and they were doing arms drill with wooden rifles.

Erode and Salem

In February 1943 the 2nd Bn moved down to South India for railway protection duties and were stationed at Erode. These duties covered an area stretching from Bangalore to Trichinopoly, involving over 100 miles of line. At Erode the Bn was under canvas and there was not much to do, which was bad for morale. The only recreation for officers was to visit station dining rooms where reasonable meals could be obtained. But it was extremely interesting to observe the Tamils and the Southern Indian way of life as distinct from the Punjab.

From January 1944 to February 1945 two companies at a time were dispatched to Jungle Warfare Schools at Gudalur and Shimoga where they provided demonstration troops. During this period every officer and man underwent training in jungle warfare both individual and collective up to company level. GHQ had intended to send them out to Burma. During this period the Bn moved from Erode to Salem.

Madras

The Bn moved in March 1945 to St Thomas' Mount, just outside Madras. Here the Bn had no specific role and was at something of a loose end. It was at Madras that Jack Crosthwaite married Helen, one of a number of ladies who came from Madras to dispense tea to the *jawans*, and afterwards to be entertained in the Officers' Mess.

The Bn was earmarked for the Burma front, but due to the surrender of the Japanese the move did not materialize. The troops were very much disappointed and to recompense them the C-in-C during his tour of Madras area comforted the Bn by ordering its move to Iraq and then Syria.

2.3 The Formation of the 3rd Bn Mazbhi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment

Sialkot: August 1942 – September 1942

On 6th August 1942 orders were received for the 2 i/c of the 1st Bn, Maj E P F Pearse (34 RSP) to go to Sialkot to the 13 Pioneer Bn, Indian Engineer Group, to become CO on its conversion to 3rd Bn M & R Sikh Regiment.

The 13th Pioneer Bn was raised from Mazbhi and Ramdasia Sikhs in April 1942 and so was just over three months old when it had to transform into the 3rd Bn. It had experienced the same difficulties with lack of instructors as the 1st and 2nd Bns, only worse, and regretfully Lt Col Price had to remark, 'with instructions to raise the Bn from the dregs of an Engineer Bn'. At this time the officers of the 13th Pioneer Bn, Indian Engineer Group were:

CO	Lt Col S A Bowden (32 SP)	
2 i/c	Maj J F Hill	RE
Adjutant	Capt R R Mestor	RE
Quartermaster	Lt J Thompson	IE

The Raising of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment

Company	Capt A Donaldson	RE A Coy
Commanders	Capt A D Mitchell	RE B Coy
	Capt W H O Short	RE C Coy
	2 Lt Jiwan Singh	on transfer of
		Capt Short
	2 Lt V C Jacobs	RE D Coy

Unlike the 2nd Bn, Lt Col Pearse had to manufacture his own VCOs and NCOs except for the very few he was able to scrounge from the 1st Bn and later from the Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners. Two officers were posted from the 2nd Bn (2 Lts Ranjit Singh and K G O Fearnley), and some 70 recruits came from the same Bn, which was over strength. Capt P G Petherbridge and three other officers were posted to the 3rd Bn from 5/17 Dogra Regiment, which was disbanded after it returned to Jullundur following the 1942 retreat from Burma. It is interesting to note this connection with the Dogra Regt which had been so helpful when the 1st Bn was being raised a year previously.

Capt Petherbridge was the first British officer to report, and on the strength of this he was appointed QM, to take over the stores and effects of the Pioneer Bn, a task for which he admitted to being totally untrained and unprepared. At that time 'Pumpus' Pearse was quite incredible. He would walk along the lines inspecting the Pioneers, a number of whom he remembered from the early Thirties when the original Sikh Pioneers had been disbanded. Some he refused to accept, but the majority he welcomed into his new Battalion.

In particular there was a VCO who had been sent from one of the Bns as a likely Sub Maj. He was rejected outright as being a 'bad hat' and sent back instantly. Acting Sub Maj Darwara Singh was the first Subadar Maj of the 3rd Bn, and he was relieved by Sub Puran Singh, from 1 M & R Sikh Regiment (later Sub Maj Puran Singh, Sardar Bahadur, OBI) a magnificent fellow. Col Pearse and

Sub Maj Puran Singh together made a most formidable team.

Agra: September 1942 – February 1943

The Bn moved to Agra almost immediately and there carried out Bn and Bde training in most agreeable conditions. Christmas in Agra 1942 brought back the happiest of recollections. The Bn however made a representation for a change of location on grounds of lack of sufficient training area, which was granted by GHQ(I).

Bellary: February 1943 – September 1945

On reaching Bellary, the Bn was put up in tents due to lack of *pukka* or hutted accommodation. Bellary turned out to be a good training ground due to both its geographical location and the role that the Bn had to play later.

After six months the Bn was, like the 2nd Bn, put on the heart-breaking task of railway protection in Southern India, with their HQ at Bellary, about twenty miles west of the railway junction at Guntakal, which itself is on the main line from Bombay to Madras. Following the Congress riots, it was deemed that the railways were at risk and the Bn's task was to guard the bridges from the Tungahbadra River in the north to Dhamavaram in the south — a distance of well over 100 miles.

This was a disastrous arrangement for a young Battalion with inexperienced British officers, VCOs and NCOs. Two companies went out at a time split into platoons and even sections. Maintenance of control and discipline was extremely difficult and at no time was the Bn ever assembled together. Many DOs went off to the Regiment's guardian angel in Delhi (Gen Reggie Savory) and the Bn got a steady supply of equipment, but even he could not change the Bn's role and they were in fact spread out on soulless railway protection duty for more than two years. The Bn did have its own tactical train which was used for inspections and changing the various guards, and this was certainly a diversion which created

some interest.

A good deal of hockey was played and there were a number of wrestling events arranged, but all in all it was not a good time for the Bn.

It was at this time that, by Royal proclamation, the Regiment came to be known as *The Sikh Light Infantry* and the Battalion as *The 3rd Battalion, the Sikh Light Infantry*.

Thal and Wana: September 1945 – July 1947

In 1945 they followed the 2nd Bn as Demonstration Battalion for the Jungle Warfare School at Shimoga, and at the beginning of the cold weather in 1945 they moved up to Thal in Kurram. This was a small station on the Frontier, where they formed part of the Kohat Bde. This was an excellent period as the Bn was all together and able to train as a unit.

Picqueting and ‘opening the road’ were fresh experiences, especially in the new and exciting atmosphere of the North-West Frontier, and came as a welcome tonic after the lack-lustre operations on the railways of Southern India. For the British officers, Thal was a family station and much enjoyed despite their being accommodated in bungalows outside the fort, and a constant watch against tribesmen had to be kept.

Madras: July 1947 – 1948

On arrival at Madras at the end of July 1947 the Bn was split, Bn HQ going to St Thomas Mount, one company to an ordnance depot at Gummindipundi and two to St George Fort, Madras, all for various guard duties. The Bn had the honour of taking over the historic fort of St George from a British infantry battalion on 3rd August 1947. The Bn remained in the area until January 1948.

From the raising of the 3rd Bn in August 1942 Lt Col E P F ‘Pumpus’ Pearse had been CO and Puran Singh the Sub Maj. No two men could have worked harder or done more in the very

difficult circumstances that prevailed for so much of the time, to create a new 3rd Bn when surrounded by so little experience. To them is owed much of the credit for the eventual success of the Bn, which became a first-class unit.

The main appointments were:

CO	Lt Col E P F Pearse (34 RSP)
2 i/c	Maj P G Petherbridge
Adjutant	Capt M R J Waring
QM	Capt P G Petherbridge (initially)

2.4 The Formation of Garrison Bns and Coys, M & R Sikh Regiment

25th Garrison Bn

Poona: August – December 1942

The 25th Garrison Bn was raised at Poona in about August 1942, under the command of Lt Col E C Le Patourel, MC (9 Jats), and was almost immediately sent to the Middle East. They were stationed in Iraq and Iran and employed on escort and protection duties, although they were periodically let off for Bn and Bde training. As Iran itself was previously unwilling to accept the Allies' presence, the British and Russians had 'invaded' it in August 1941 in order to establish a base from which to channel supplies to the Russians.

Abadan and Khorramshahr: January 1943 – March 1946

In late 1945 the Bn was stationed at Abadan, the huge Anglo-Iranian Oil Company refinery from where much of the oil necessary for the war effort was processed. The safeguarding of this oil was a vital role, and will come to the fore again later.

In January 1946 the Bn moved to barracks in Khorramshahr, where it operated guard posts and security patrols for the British Petroleum refinery at Abadan, and the port installations and

railhead at Khorramshahr. Until the end of the war, Khorramshahr was an ocean terminal for Allied supplies to Russia, which then went by truck convoys right up to the Russian frontier. The 25th also did escort runs with these convoys on an occasional basis.

The CO was Lt Col Le Patourel who, by 1946 had some 30 years of service, broken presumably by the inter-war retrenchments. The second-in-command was Maj C G Mitchell, and there was a Sikh Maj, probably Gurpartap Singh who joined in February or March 1946. Lt T D McKenzie (known as Big Mac!) took over from the QM who went on release in the middle of 1946, and Capt D R Casselle filled the vacant position of Adjutant. There was also an MO, but apart from this there were no KCOs and the companies were commanded by Subadars. The Bn never had more than five or six KCOs at any one time: this may have been the standard establishment for Garrison Bns.

Many things were peculiar to the 25th — and probably to many other units as well! Examples were an officer who was court-martialled for assaulting a barman with a bottle, and another who was charged with sedition. (Before anyone criticises such behaviour, it is necessary to remember the extremely difficult conditions in that part of the world. The temperatures could rise to fantastic levels, as much as 140 degrees F in the shade — except that there never was any shade. Near the coast the humidity was very high, and the facilities were of a very poor standard. The French Foreign Legion called it *caffard* or desert madness, and it was probably the same sort of thing at Abadan and Khorramshahr).

By 1946 the 25th Bn was the only sizeable formation in the area: the rest had dwindled down to a company of Royal Engineers, a military hospital, a US Air Force base, a small group of OSS operatives (Col Donovan's forerunners of the CIA) and a small section of the Intelligence Corps Special Investigations Branch. Some Persian militia were based in the ex-American supply depot, which had been purchased complete with its contents by a syndicate of

Teheran businessmen.

There was excitement from time to time. In February 1946 there was considerable gunfire in the vicinity of the ex-US Army depot. A garbled report came in from one of our patrols, to the effect that the Duty VCO had been fired on from within the depot while on his rounds, and that our patrol was consequently shooting it out with the depot garrison. Capt Casselle took out a motorised platoon to see what was what. On the road towards the incident area they were passed by three 6½ tonners loaded with Persian militia ... he reckoned that added up to at least 150 men. And the lorries had .50 calibre MMGs mounted over the cabs. Casselle's view was that it could well be one of those days when it would have been better to have stayed in bed. It was all quiet when the patrol was located, about half a mile from the depot perimeter. After deploying the platoon, the officer went with a section to see what was happening at the depot. Fortunately they were challenged by a Persian officer who spoke French. He claimed that it was all a case of mistaken identity due to a security guard who couldn't tell the difference between two Sikhs in a truck and a local peasant making away with goods stolen from the depot. The only casualty was the aforesaid guard! Since the patrol had sustained no losses, and the Persian militia had gone off to lurk inside the depot, it was agreed that hostilities would cease and an inquest could wait till morning.

Came the morning and Col Le Patourel took charge of the proceedings, from which nothing much emerged except that he decided to increase the patrolling strength in that area, in case the Persians fancied their chances again.

A few days later, about ten civilians loaded with booty from the depot came strolling past our patrol and few if any of them survived the encounter. Le Patourel had the corpses dumped on the Town Maj's doorstep, in a neat line. *Tea Biscuit* from the Foreign Office (see later) was swiftly on the scene but showed no great concern, even though one of the dead was alleged to be the son of a

sheikh. Had a duck got caught up in the mêlée, his attitude would no doubt have been different. It was a sad affair which reflected no credit on anybody, but could have resulted in death or injury well after the end of the war, in a remote part of the world. It probably discouraged any further attempts at looting, and news of the affair reached the 2nd Battalion, at that time across the river at Shaibah.

The Garrison Bn was organised and equipped in much the same way as British or Indian infantry and had acquired very similar attitudes. A changed outlook was inevitable from close association with British and American troops, plus better conditions of service than in India. The differences invariably affected Indian Army units serving abroad, and led to considerable problems of readjustment on their return home.

Although perpetual guard duty of one kind or another is hardly an inspiring role, the Battalion's morale and efficiency was high. In spite of his many eccentricities — or perhaps as much because of them — Col Le Patourel was revered by all ranks. This might not have been the case with the more senior generals, especially when he would casually remark that his established rank was senior to that of most generals. A comment from one of his officers seems appropriate: '... if you screwed up, he called you a silly b....., told you to put it right — now, if not sooner — and recommended suicide if you let it happen again!' Having said that, there was some evidence suggesting that serious misdemeanours went on. Possibly this was inevitable, bearing in mind that illegality was the norm out there. When you have a unit stationed in one of the backwaters of the war, working among a hotch-potch of British, Indian, American and Russian soldiery, plus an oil company colony of expatriates, and a host of indigenous wheeler-dealers — well, everything has a tendency to be enacted several sizes larger than life. Failure to condone certain activities — or worse, holier-than-thou attempts to prevent them — could and did have nasty consequences.

Capt Casselle, who provided much of this information,

continues:

I learned all this through being detailed to mingle, fraternise, act-up 'the innocent abroad' and report back everything which might be even remotely in the Col's interest to know. My world then became largely populated by colourful characters. For instance ...

Hannibal... A Hungarian ex-cavalry officer of 1914–1918 war vintage. Latterly a Mister Fixit, all-purpose go-between. Drove around in a vast Cadillac, reputedly won off a US Air Force general at poker after bluffing with two low pairs against a full-house of Aces and Queens. Real name quite unpronounceable.

Fat Daddy... Head of the Persian business syndicate that bought the American supply depot. He asked me to do a rough inventory — because it was sold without one, and then became resold, piecemeal, to more investors, and nobody was going to open up except to a neutral observer. I told him they'd been had: like a million cans of pork luncheon meat, astro-navigation charts, filing cabinets, arctic clothing, *et al.* Was he thinking of starting another war somewhere, I asked. At which, he gave me a lecture that did in effect forecast US embroilment in Korea and Vietnam, and thus the opportunity to sell the stuff back at an immense profit.

Flash Gordon... A US Army captain. Another Mister Fixit. Often accompanied by an OSS chum who ostentatiously carried a Colt .45 automatic in a shoulder holster. Said to have negotiated payment in dollars for the supply depot, extracted his commission before putting the loot on a B17 (Flying Fortress bomber) straight back to the States. Always had some lottery on the go.

Tea Biscuit... So-named because he always wore a beige suit and shirt; same colour underwear, too, I shouldn't be surprised. A Foreign Office third-secretary or some such. Periodically came visiting to complain about an atrocity — e.g. four Engineer officers duck-shooting with tommy guns at 50 mph in a Jeep. They crashed the Jeep, of course, and did not

do themselves a lot of good in the process. Our beige friend showed no concern over that but was incensed about what he described as the decimation of the region's wildlife.

The Basrah Bitch... Rosanna Galento, American WAC sergeant who ran the PX (NAAFI or Canteen). I asked what currency was acceptable; anything except marks or yen, she replied. How did she work out all those exchange rates, I enquired. Against the customer, dum-dum, she said. She was near enough six feet tall and built like a brick privy, so you didn't argue.

Polack... Natashe Czsnscka, ex-librarian and free-lance journalist who fled Warsaw when the Russians were pounding at the gates. Clerical services for hire — and forget any ideas about anything cosy to go with them. She tolerated me because I would occasionally guide her through the more sordid court cases reported in the *News of the World*. I suppose this somehow tied in with her declared ambition to make her way to England, get a nice apartment in South Kensington and a job with the BBC. Col Le Patourel said she fancied me and that it was a pity that I was already married, because she would have made a man of me, she would ... As they say: there was no answer to that.

In my opinion, the 25th was a rough-and-ready lot but, in its own way, an effectively disciplined battalion; and earlier on had the potential to be a great one. I very much hope that those who chose to serve on after its disbandment were able to adapt and to help build the foundations of the success and prestige that the Regiment enjoys today.

These episodes give a vivid if sketchy picture of life in what was obviously a very difficult situation. The shortage of officers put much more responsibility on VCOs who commanded companies, and on the platoon commanders and section leaders. They were not having to deal with a conventional situation or conventional characters, as is clearly shown in the account above. Still, the job had to be done, and 25th Sikh LI were the ones to do it.

After Khorramshahr the battalion returned to Lahore for disbandment in March 1946, arriving there in April. Col Le Patourel commanded them throughout their entire existence.

The senior officers of the Battalion in February or March 1946 were:

CO	Lt Col E C Le Patourel, MC
2 i/c	Maj C G Mitchell
Adjutant	Capt D R Casselle
QM	Capt T D McKenzie
MO	<i>Not known</i>
Other officer	Maj Gurpartap Singh

26th Garrison Bn

The 26th Garrison Bn, M & R Sikh Regiment was raised at Aurangabad by Lt Col R de V R Fox, MC (11 Sikhs), although other records show the place of raising as Poona.

At some stage they moved to Poona, where, it is reported, they were in barracks opposite the Aga Khan's palace guarding Mahatma Gandhi, who was interned there. As in the case of the 25th Bn, they were also employed on escort and protection duties on the railway from Bombay to Poona, and they could be seen with rifles and bayonets guarding bridges and crossings.

In December 1945 Lt Col Fox handed over command to Lt Col Mallinson (Dogra) and in May 1946 they returned to Lahore for disbandment.

35th and 37th Labour/Garrison Companies

These two Labour companies were sent to the Middle East in 1940, probably soon after the declaration of war by Italy on 11th June 1940. The strong Italian forces in Libya and Abyssinia (Ethiopia) threatened the British position in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, where the main British bases were. Hostilities soon commenced: the Italians over-ran the small force in British Somaliland,

and in September the expected invasion of Egypt from Libya began.

British and Allied forces were built up in Egypt as quickly as the meagre resources available permitted, and there was an obvious need for military as opposed to dock labourers. It can be presumed (it would be nice to know for certain) that the two Labour companies consisted of Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs, and it is possible that one of them was commanded by an old Sikh Pioneer, Maj N P Robinson (2/23 SP). He had lived in South Africa after leaving the Sikh Pioneers, and was certainly at the siege of Tobruk, where he was wounded by enemy action.

The companies obviously started in Egypt, but with the success of Gen Wavell's offensive which began in December 1940 the supplies were able to be transported by sea to Tobruk, which was the base for the Labour companies. Incidentally, the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade of 4th Indian Division was commanded by Brig R A Savory at the time of Wavell's counter-offensive.

In 1943 the two Labour companies moved over to Iraq in the area of Basrah, now a very important supply base for the Russian front, through Iran; there was also a detachment at Bahrein. At some stage they were absorbed into the Regiment and became 1 and 2 Garrison companies. They returned to the Regimental Centre at Lahore in October 1945 and were disbanded in February 1946.

3 Garrison Company

This Garrison Company, originally 87 Garrison Coy, was first employed on Garrison and L of C duties in the rear areas of the Burma campaign, and finished up with five months in the Cocos Islands. These are isolated in the central Indian Ocean, about half-way between the southern tip of India and the north west tip of Australia. They returned to the Regimental Centre at Lahore in May 1946 for disbandment.

127 Garrison Training Company

This training company was stationed in Bareilly for the whole of its independent career until its absorption by the Regimental Centre in September 1945. The OC in 1942 was Capt Dilbagh Singh Sidhu. It presumably recruited and trained for the Garrison Bns and Coys. It ceased to exist altogether in March 1946.

2.5 The formation of the Training Battalion at Bareilly

Initially, training of all recruits had to be carried out by the various Battalions of the Regiment, and in Indian Army terms almost everyone was a recruit or at best a very junior and inexperienced soldier. As Col Price remarked, the greatest problem was the shortage of experienced leaders, and this would take much time and effort to overcome. Late in 1943, that is, some two years after the formation of the 1st Bn and eighteen months after the 2nd and 3rd Bns were raised, the need for a dedicated training unit was accepted.

So a Training Battalion was set up as part of the 9th Jat Regimental Centre at Bareilly. The somewhat *kachcha* lines were separate from those of the Jats, but the officers, having no proper building to house their own Mess, were able to share the excellent, well-established Jat's Officers Mess. The Battalion was commanded by yet another former Sikh Pioneer officer, Lt Col P White (34 RSP), and in September 1943 Hon Lt Sohan Singh, Sardar Bahadur, OBI (who had served with 32 Sikh Pioneers) had been re-employed and was appointed Sub Maj of the Training Battalion.

The battalion consisted of two Training Companies, each with some 400 recruits, sub-divided into platoons which bore the names of Sikh Pioneer battle honours (e.g. China, Festubert etc.). There would be a Coy Comd and usually three or four junior officers, newly-commissioned and new to the Regiment and to the men

who were enlisted in it. For them it would be an opportunity to meet the men and learn their particular strengths and weaknesses and, above all, to get the 'feel' of the Regiment; something quite tangible, yet impossible to put into words. But this would now have been the new Sikh Light Infantry: time was too short to permit instruction in the proud records and traditions of the Sikh Pioneers.

There was also a Duty Company and HQ, including a Records and Accounts section under Maj J R Ross, to look after those vital aspects of military life. This section employed some eighty clerks and held some 7,000 records — quite a number. The instructors in the first instance were Jats, but they were replaced by our own men as soon as these could be spared by the Active Battalions. There was no Weapon Training Officer as such on the establishment at that time. Instruction, demonstrations etc. were carried out by a small team of VCOs and Havs under the supervision of the 2 i/c (in 1944) Maj Mohinder Singh, MC. In May 1945 Capt Routley was recalled from Saharanpur to become the first established Weapon Training Officer. In addition there was a Boys' Company under the command of Capt J W Warner, who was a keen athlete.

It has to be realised that all the men in the Indian Army were volunteers; in our case of the same religion and caste, who very often followed father and grandfather into the Army and indeed into the Regiment. The men were mostly poorish farmers from the Punjab. They were not at all used to western-style clothes and boots, and route marches would often be completed with the majority of the new recruits barefoot, until they got used to the Army boot. Similarly the concept of left and right had to be taught, and this could be quite amusing or exasperating, depending on how one looked at it. But very quickly the men would get the 'hang' of things, and from then on progress would be quite rapid.

Training started with drill and turnout, the basic essentials for all soldiers, and then went on to weapon training and live firing of rifle

and LMGs, and throwing of grenades; this latter was always quite interesting for a brand new batch of recruits. Then there would be route marches to toughen up the body and tactical exercises to sharpen up military skills, and always a good proportion of time for sports which, apart from hockey, included volley ball, wrestling, *kabaddi*, and even football, the latter usually played in bare feet, except by the officers! These were often on a competitive basis and were entered into with great enthusiasm, especially hockey which, on a hard mud pitch, could be almost lethal as the desire to win sometimes overcame judgment. But the men were in good heart and always cheerful, keen to get training done and to be posted to an Active Battalion.

Maj Watkin has provided the following comments on aspects of life and training at the Training Battalion:

Opium Eaters! A problem in the Trg Bn was with recruits who turned out to be opium eaters. They tended to collapse when deprived of their fix, a lump of brown tobacco-like substance which they actually ate. It was difficult to cure them although there was an 'opium eaters squad' under a senior VCO who gave them rather a hard life. IA Regulations had it that we must detect them in the first two months of service in order to discharge them — otherwise they had to be retained and given an opium ration. At this time recruiting was to a large extent in the hands of recruiting agents in the Punjab — mostly substantial landowners — who would produce recruits to the recruiting officers and be paid so much per head. We had 'professional deserters' who ran away only to be recruited again by the same agents who collected another commission.

Sports. We had a first-class hockey team in Bareilly which reached the area final, fiercely contested! Other sports included Punjabi wrestling between two individual opponents stripped down to loincloths, and probably covered in coconut oil, in an area about the size of a large boxing ring: another was *kabaddi*, a game of challenge between two teams

arranged in lines either side of a dividing line — and rather like catch-as-catch-can, only more violent, and requiring a strong pair of lungs.

Basic training. This was quite a lengthy business. The recruits were very *jangli* and mostly totally illiterate, and had to be taught basic Roman Urdu and numbers. They couldn't even read the calibrations on a rifle back sight. Moreover they were generally of poor physique. For the first two months we fed them up and gave them extra milk. Basic training took four months followed by one month's leave. After that came field training and finally jungle warfare training at Saharanpur. After all that I reckon they were ready for most things. They were dead keen and never went outside the lines during the first four months, and spent much of their evenings doing weapon training, off their own bat!

One particular problem was always education for the more specialised roles within the Bn, such as signallers and NCOs. Classes in Roman Urdu (parts I and II) were organised, for which there was a money award, and which helped promotion to L Nk and Nk. There were also classes in English, mainly for VCOs and signallers. Younger recruits were taken on as Boys; this gave more time for language and other teaching.

Language — For officers it was expected that they would pass the Lower Standard (Elementary) Urdu examination to enable them to communicate with the Indian troops. There was a reward of Rs.50 for having passed, and it may also have helped in promotion to Capt. To obtain an emergency commission into the Indian Army at that time it was (usually) necessary for British officer cadets to pass the Elementary Urdu examination at their OTS or Military Academy. Those cadets who came from the UK by the long sea journey around the Cape had the advantage of initial instruction from older officers, usually Indians, during their several weeks at sea. They then gained proficiency with lessons given by professional *munshis* (teachers) at their Training School or Academy in

India.

The next stage was the Higher Standard in Urdu examination which would be left to the individual officer or to his Regiment. Passing this exam had a reward of Rs.100 and would, perhaps, have helped in gaining promotion to Maj.

The official text book was *Khawab-o-Khayal* which included *From Sepoy to Sub* by Sita Ram which Maj Watkin remembers included Sir Arthur Wellesley's campaign in India and his duel with Tipoo Sahib culminating in the Battle of Seringapatam. All this required mastery of the Persi-Arabic script which, in peacetime, there may well have been time to accomplish: but with the pressures of war only a few officers made the effort. Those who did found the local *munshis* in Bareilly quite good. It was a worthwhile experience to be invited to their homes for a meal, and to have to talk to the family and other guests in the vernacular.

Perhaps it would have been better for the younger officers to have learned as much Punjabi as possible in order to communicate directly with the jawans — and ignore the prize money!

When the Training Bn moved to Lahore there was an excellent text book on Punjabi published by the local *Civil and Military Gazette* (known affectionately as the *Drivel and Dilatory*). Some of the clerks in the Battalion's offices were also interested in acquiring or 'borrowing' a copy.

But for all this the VCOs in particular were always ready to help, even if they had a good chuckle afterwards; and the training went on. After basic training, which took four months, all recruits or rather soldiers (*sepoys*) as they had become, were sent to the Jungle Warfare Training Centre with 39 Indian Division in the Siwalik Hills below Dehra Dun and close to Saharanpur. After some apprehension by the Jats, a Training Company for the M & R Sikh Regiment was established with the 7/9th Jat Regiment (commanded by Lt Col Visheshar Nauth Singh) and forming part of 113 Ind Inf Bde (commanded by Brig Bourke). The training centre was situated in

the wooded hills of Badshahibagh, a renowned big game-hunting area before the war, just down the main road from the Timli Pass on the road to Dehra Dun. Maj Jim Baldwin of the Jats was put in command of the M & R Sikhs at Jungle Warfare Training and he wrote:

As I think you know, I took over the training of the M & Rs and very quickly realised that they had the making of sound and reliable soldiers. I think that to a degree they felt that they had to show that they were at least as good as anyone else; they were full of enthusiasm and had an eagerness to learn that was very satisfying to me. But what gave me the greatest pleasure and made me feel proud to be associated with them, apart from their determination to become efficient in training, was their sense of loyalty to me. This was illustrated time and time again, and for me was quite a sobering experience. At times I felt that this sense of loyalty was more freely given than I deserved. From all the subsequent reports I received the M & Rs fulfilled all the promise they had shown with me. I had a great affection for them and am proud to have been so closely involved with them.

In a way, this sums up the affection between the Mazhbis and Ramdasias and their British officers; it was mutual, but always very freely given by the men.

The Training Battalion may have been the first experience of strong drink that some of the young, newly-commissioned British officers had had. Straight from school in many cases, and barely out of their teens, the 'Passing-out' party of their platoon of recruits was sometimes very aptly named! One amusing story must be told, without mentioning any names. Apparently, after a very good party in the Officers' Mess, a senior officer on his bicycle, the usual mode of transport in the lines, failed to turn either left or right on reaching the road from the Mess, and subsided with his bicycle into the monsoon ditch opposite. There he was found, next morning, still asleep and unharmed, by the Area (?) Commander on a visit. The Area Commander was *not* amused, and from then on it was

routine for a recruit to be detailed off to look after each officer; in practice the officer would be sat on the saddle of his bicycle, and solemnly wheeled back to his quarters, pushed and guided by the recruit. It was certainly one way of avoiding difficulties with the Area Commander!

There was no band at Bareilly: it didn't start until the Trg Bn was at Lahore when a nucleus was started. During the time at Bareilly visits were paid by the Bombay Sappers and Miners band from Kirkee in which there were many trained bandsmen of Ramdasias and Mazhbis. The conditions at Bareilly were not good; there were no VCOs' quarters and all lived in huts with thatched roofs and verandahs, and *khus-khus* tatties in the hot season. There was a VCOs' Mess to which the officers were invited from time to time, and where necessary were assisted back to their Quarters.

Eventually, after many representations, its Training Battalion was moved to Lahore on 15th October 1945. From 1st January 1946, and at the same time as its new QM Lt (QM) W E G Blythe joined, it changed its title to 'The Sikh L.I. Regimental Centre'. Sohan Singh continued as Sub Maj, Ujagar Singh as Jem Adjutant, with Santa, Daulat and Natha Singh as the senior Subs. The senior staff of the Training Battalion were:

Comdt	Lt Col P White (34 RSP)	late 1943 – March 1944
	Lt Col C H Price (32 SP)	Mar. 1944 – October 1945
2 i/c	Maj H Du Pré Moore Maj Mohinder Singh MC	
Adjt	Capt E H C Brown Capt Narrinder Singh	
QM	Capt W E G Blythe	
Pay & Records	Maj J R Ross	
Coy Comds	Capt K Draper	

Capt F Hepworth
Capt J W Warner (always Boys' Company)
Capt H Nisbet
Capt R P Watkin
Capt F E Pearson
Capt W C M Williams 'Bill Singh'
Lt Kupaswami Naidu

Other Officers Lt I B Gardner
 Lt Macfarlane

At this time the first casualties came through from the 1st Bn at Meiktila and subsequent actions, and many were looked after in the IM Hospital at Bareilly where they were visited from time to time. Many were quite badly wounded but their spirit was amazing. All they could think about was getting back into the thick of it.

A comment was made to two of our ex-officers after the VJ Anniversary Parade by someone who asked, 'Were your lot at Meiktila in 17 Div?' One of ours said, 'Yes, that was our 1st Bn', and the other added, 'They got knocked about a bit.' The questioner then remarked, 'They did bloody well and gave a damn sight more than they got!'

In addition, there was at Bareilly the 127 Garrison Training Company, charged with recruiting and training for the Garrison Bns (25th and 26th) and the Garrison Coys (1st, 2nd and 3rd). This Company was absorbed into the Training Bn in September 1945 and ceased to exist in March 1946.

2.6 The Formation of the Regimental Centre

Lt Col C H Price handed over command of the 1st Bn to Lt Col Staveley Jones (2 Punjab) in March 1944, and proceeded to Bareilly to raise the Training Bn, which at this time had become independent of the 9th Jats. In October 1945 the Regimental Centre was

moved to Lahore, into the old Cavalry Lines. Col Price remarked 'Although Lahore was a very pleasant place to visit, it is no place for a Regimental Centre', and a moment's reflection will show why. Too many distractions, too close at hand. The Lines were vast, very expensive and had too many internal security commitments.

Here the Centre reorganised again, into:

- 1 Recruits' Training Company,
- 1 Advanced Training and Holding Company,
- 1 Duty Company 1 Boys Company,
- 1 Demob. Centre,
- 1 Resettlement Centre,
- 1 Records and Administration Section.

At one time during peak demobilisation, the Centre was 3,000 strong, and men were being released at the rate of 120 per week.

Capt Eric Heath writes:

Lts Webster Smith, Brown and I joined the Training Bn at Bareilly in late May or early June 1945. There were, as I remember, HQ, A, B, C, and D Coys, Boys Coy and Records. I became OC MT Platoon, part of HQ Coy.

In October the Training Bn moved to Lahore. I took the Transport Platoon of 8 trucks and 2 motor cycles by road: it took 8 days — at times 4 trucks were towing the other 4! At Amritsar we visited the Golden Temple and my 16 *jawans* garlanded me when we came out.

About November I was promoted to Capt and took over B Coy from Hugh Nisbet. The Coy became the Demob Coy and then the Demob Centre. Much of my time was spent interviewing those due for demob and finding out where they were going and what work they wanted to do.

A few memories

The Regimental Centre had a very good pipe band.

Maj Mike Ross, the Records Officer, liked to borrow our Harley-Davidson motor-cycle and wasn't very sensitive in his use of the foot clutch. He used to take off on the rear

wheel — what is now known as a ‘wheely’.

... seeing two one-armed sepoy's jointly knitting a sock in the Regimental Centre.

Freddy Hepworth had a black eye from being knocked off his bike one night by a low-flying owl. Sometimes he could be seen in mess kit preparing the joint for dinner because the mess cooks weren't good at it.

The Centre also took over the 12,000 Sikh Pioneer Records and the Sikh Charitable Fund from the Sappers and Miners. Col Price describes the Regimental Centre as definitely the *man-bap* of the Regiment and a very different cup of tea from the old Training Bn. In addition to the functions of the old Training Bn it had to train boys (aged 15 to 17), to carry out post-basic training of recruits as the Training Divisions had ceased to exist; and to hold the current and past records of the whole Regiment. This included the Pay and all Promotions and grants of GS Pay and Proficiency Pay. It can be imagined that the Centre was an interesting job, if nothing else.

In February 1946 Lt Gen Sir Reginald Savory, CB, DSO, MC, Adjutant General in India was asked to become Col of the Regiment by the Comdt Sikh LI Regimental Centre and, despite the knowledge that if he accepted he would be barred from the Colonelcy of his own Regiment (the Sikh Regiment), he accepted the appointment. This was confirmed by HM the King on 3rd April 1946 and was no doubt warmly welcomed by all ranks of the Regiment. At about the same time HH the Raja of Faridkot became Honorary Col.

And finally, in October 1946, it was announced that the Regiment would take the Army List precedence of the Sikh Pioneers and be permitted to carry their battle honours. The wheel had turned full circle!

On 15th October Lt Col Price handed over command of the Centre to Lt Col E P F Pearce (34 RSP), soon followed by Lt Col Ricketts, MC, who was the last British officer to hold that post.

Farewell Lahore

a personal account of the Regimental Centre

J M Ricketts

On return to India after completing my end-of-war leave in 1946, I set off up-country from Bombay to rejoin my Frontier Force Regimental Centre in Sialkot. Stopping off *en route* in Delhi, I learned of my transfer to a newly formed regiment, the Sikh Light Infantry. Who were they, I wondered? I was to be second in command to Col C H Price, commanding its Regimental Centre in Lahore — a wonderful station. ‘Prix’ Price I knew well and looked forward to being with him; he, too was from my 2nd Bn, 12th Frontier Force Regiment and he had known my father in the old Sikh Pioneers. Before joining, I had not realised that this new regiment of whom I had heard great things spoken of its performance in Burma, were the reraised gallant old Mazbhi and Ramdasias Sikhs, the actual descendants of the famous old Sikh Pioneers! I had loved my Sikh company of the 3rd Bn 12th Frontier Force Regiment in the Middle East and was well content to be with Sikhs again. I shall always remember the welcome from Sub Maj Sohan Singh who embraced me saying, ‘Sahib, I was a L Nk in your father’s company!’

Soon afterwards, on 15th October 1946, Col Price retired and was succeeded by Col ‘Pumpus’ Pearse who came from the 2/3 Punjab Regiment. He was just the man for the job, but he was soon to depart for England on leave, not having been home for seven years. No one could have anticipated the awful happenings of the following summer of 1947 and no passage was available for Pearse to return. The Centre was at the core of the Punjab tragedy and I was privileged to remain in command over a vital period. The position became critical when the flooded Sutlej halted the projected move of the Centre to Ferozepur and we were marooned after 15th August in the newly created state of Pakistan. Lahore, outside the Centre confines, had suddenly become hostile territory; communal relations, like the fires, shootings and ambushes under the smoke-filled sky, ran riot. I had

no first-hand memories of the traditional courage of our M & R in the heat of battle, but they gave proof enough of their coolness and dependability in the face of the severest provocation and just when they could not be expected to understand why the old India they knew had suddenly gone mad. While the civil administration lay in ruins they continued guarding VIP bungalows and buildings in the cantonment and even within the city itself. They were indispensable.

As it turned out, the Centre's immobility was a blessing not only to the old Sikh Pioneer refugees from their settlements in the West Punjab but to many a Sikh family fleeing eastwards to the new Pakistan-Indian border. 'Luck' lines in Mir Mir were soon known as a safe harbour and staging post along the escape route to India. We looked more like a refugee camp than a training depot and it became impossible to continue with our normal role. Temporary food and shelter, medical aid and limited transport were provided for numerous military pensioners and their families: also, doubtless, various co-religionists besides. All these unfortunates were passed through with the minimum delay while, somehow, the ration situation was masterminded.

Incredibly, while all this was going on, communications remained unbroken with our Col, General Savory, who was Adjutant General in Delhi (by telephone) and with our Honorary Col, His Highness the Rajah of Faridkot (by Air). We owed much to both of them; to the General for his support and advice and to HH for his material help on the spot. He sent his little L5 plane over for me one evening and, taking off from the polo ground, I was soon ensconced in the palace where, over some Rajah-sized whiskies, he suddenly announced a typically generous offer to feed and house 3,000 Sikhs for 6 months. I can't swear to these figures now, but they certainly took my breath away. This wonderful gesture, like his numerous gifts to the Regiment on becoming an Honorary Sikh Light Infantryman, was supremely important; our men and their families knew they had a haven in Faridkot just over the border. After a final Maharajah-sized peg it was getting dark, so we hurried off back to

Lahore, landing with the aid of our own lights. I was glad not to be doing the driving!

For our Centre to have been still in Lahore at Partition was a stroke of luck. We were at the most vital spot in the Punjab. We were to have gone to Sialkot, a move rendered impossible by the division of India. I like to think that, in an internal crisis in its country's history, the Centre rose to the occasion and midst civil anarchy and bloodshed helped keep some semblance of the former state of law and order, so preserving many lives and much property. The practical precept of the old Sikh Pioneers, 'Either find a way or make one' may not have been quite apt in the conditions, but it seemed to indicate the direction where advantage could be snatched from adversity. Thanks to the steadfast loyalty of all ranks this was done.

The 1st Bn moves East

3.1 Moving Up

Raiwalla: March – April 1944

In March the Bn moved to Raiwalla, about ten miles out of Dehra Dun, to the Jungle Training School for battalion training. The Bn was ordered to prepare for a move to the Arakan in Burma for operations. These orders were changed in late April when the Japanese threat to that area ceased.

Maj J C Orgill (14 Punjab Regiment) arrived as 2 i/c and the Company Commanders were Worne, Maling, Ewert and Campbell-Austin.

Ranchi: May to September (99 Bde)

The pace of training was being stepped-up to Bde level at Ranchi, in readiness to join 17 Indian Division, who were then fighting at Imphal. Lt Col Staveley Jones unfortunately was involved in an accident in May, only a month or so after taking over as CO. He drove a carrier into a tree and bust his kneecap and had to leave for hospital: Maj Orgill acted as CO and Maj Maling as 2 i/c. Staveley-Jones did not return to the battalion.

On 23rd June 1944 the name of the Regiment was changed from the technically correct but generally unpopular Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh Regiment to the Sikh Light Infantry. Gen Savory used to tell an amusing story about the difficulties of getting a decision on the new name at GHQ. Various suggestions were put forward: Sikh Fusiliers, Sikh Rifles or Sikh Light Infantry and the

latter name was selected after a vote was taken. Apparently ‘Reggie’ Savory suggested Sikh Brenadiers, on the lines of Grenadiers but with a much more modern weapon in the title; this concentrated minds and produced the alternatives mentioned above. As a curiosity, this choice of name was not accompanied by a change of Regimental badge, which as Light Infantry should have incorporated a bugle-horn. Gen Savory used to say that he always visualised a unit of troops able to travel light across all sorts of terrain, rather as the old Sikh Pioneers used to do, and not marching at break-neck speed and madly blowing bugles!

On this subject, John Maling says that the Bns were asked by Col Price which of the suggested names were preferred. ‘The consensus of opinion was that we preferred Sikh LI as long as we did not have to make a war time change to Light Infantry customs in drill, dress etc.’ This was agreed by GHQ.

Ranchi: May 1944 – January 1945 (17 Indian Division)

The Battalion was moved to several different camps in the Ranchi area, including Lohardaga, Dipatoli and Namkun during this period, living in tents or makeshift *bashas*. The monsoon made this very trying.

Training was sharply intensified on the arrival from Burma of 17 Ind Div with its supporting weapons in late September 1944. At about this time Lt Col W H Barlow-Wheeler (11 Sikh Regiment) took over from Maj Orgill as CO and the latter left the Battalion.

The principal officers then were:

CO	Lt Col W H Barlow-Wheeler
2 i/c	Maj J D Maling, MC
Adjutant	Capt H Whitaker
	Maj J A Hett
Quartermaster	Capt A B Burnett
MO	Capt B V Kale, IMS

The 1st Bn moves East

Company	Maj D J Ewert
Commanders	Maj J Worne
	Capt Macfarlane
	Maj G Campbell-Austin
	Capt D L Blois Admin Coy

The Battalion provided the Divisional Demonstration Company for tactical training (Maj Jock Worne's company). Training took place with 255 Indian Tank Bde [5 (Probyn's) Horse and 9 Royal Deccan Horse, both with Sherman tanks and 16 Light Cavalry with armoured cars] starting in September. This involved a lot of live ammunition firing with the tank regiments, the troops going in against simulated bunkers as close as ten yards; the tanks would switch from 75mm HE shells to solid anti-tank shot for the last few yards. This was wonderful training and the liaison with tank commanders was excellent. (Chaplin's book *Action in Burma 1942-45* gives the best description of training and then the actions of 17 Ind Div.)

Changes in organisation to suit the projected role of the Bn were fairly frequent at this time. A carrier platoon was formed and equipped and then disbanded. The 3" mortar platoon ended up with mule transport. The Animal Transport Platoon (mules) was sent on ahead of the Bn when the Division moved from Ranchi so that it could be held in the Imphal area with the rear Divisional echelons, to join the Bn at Meiktila much later. In fact, it was not until the Bn had got to the Shan States in June 1945 that the animal transport platoon rejoined the battalion.

In December 1944, 99 Bde was ordered to move to the Imphal area, early in January 1945, for unspecified action as part of 17 Division. All Divisional signs were to be removed. Preparations for this move were completed very quickly.

At the last moment the Bn lost two senior Company Commanders. Maj Campbell-Austin was posted elsewhere and Maj

Worne was involved in a bad jeep accident causing him to stay in Ranchi Hospital for several months. Maj Ewert was also injured in this accident but, swathed in bandages, was able to accompany the Battalion. Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler was detained in Ranchi, on urgent business, for some weeks and was unable to join the battalion until sometime in February.

The loss of senior officers at this stage was serious. The battalion was very fortunate in receiving Maj M H W Robinson (11 Sikh Regiment) as a replacement Company Commander. He took over D Company from Maj Campbell-Austin when we left Ranchi. Capt Macfarlane, who had been with the battalion a short time, took over Worne's C Company.

Journey to the Imphal Plain (Wangjing): January 1945

The 1st Bn moved from Ranchi to the Imphal Plain (Wangjing) after a somewhat eventful trip. Lt Col John Maling writes:

Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler was detained by events in Ranchi when we set off from there by train to Dimapur, the railhead for Imphal. I was therefore commanding officer for our journey which took us across the Ganges and the Bramhaputra Rivers. We crossed the latter river at Gauhati by ferry and reloaded in a hurry on to a metre-gauge railway line for the run to Dimapur. It was dusk and the men's evening meal had been prepared and was being eaten at a flat area by Gauhati railway Station — a few hundred yards away from where the train was drawn up.

I had just started dinner in my rail compartment when suddenly the Orderly VCO appeared at my carriage with an urgent message from Maj Donald Blois, the Orderly British Officer for the day. The message was to the effect that 'the ammunition wagon was on fire, Maj Blois was doing what he could but he had not located any fire extinguishers or water buckets. The wagon was at the front of the train and was not blazing but smoking.' The only cheering part of the message was that the engine driver was present with his

engine. As the VCO, my orderly and I ran up the train, past the sentries in their positions outside each of their carriages, a message was going to the Companies to stay away from the train until further orders. We found Donald Blois had got the wagon open and had located the seat of the fire in the general stores, which made up the rear half of the long steel wagon, with a clear gap of three or four feet between the general stores and the regiment's ammunition.

The general stores were now burning brightly. There was another stores wagon, marked 'Royal Engineers Stores', between the engine and our burning wagon. After a very brief discussion with the engine driver we decided to uncouple the two front wagons from the rest of the train. The driver would then take us slowly out of the station whilst we unloaded all the ammunition onto the sides of the railway line from the doors on each side of the burning wagon. So we puffed gently down the track whilst Maj Blois, the duty VCO, two sepoy and I worked quickly to move all the battalion's first-line ammunition boxes of .303 ammunition, 3" and 2" mortar bombs, grenades of all varieties (nos 36,77 and M9A1), Very pistol cartridges and 808 plastic explosive. The draught of incoming air kept the flames of the burning general stores away from us and in a very short time we had thrown all the ammunition out. The engine driver stopped on our yelled request, the somewhat exhilarated Sikh LI unloading team dismounted, the front RE wagon was uncoupled and taken to a safe distance, and the general stores burnt themselves out. At this stage we were joined by two British RE soldiers who had been in the front wagon but who had been unaware of what was going on behind them. They said that their wagon gave them enough space to unroll their sleeping bags, but it had been a tight squeeze as their wagonload was made up of closely packed large acetylene gas cylinders!

In a remarkably short time the burnt-out wagon was shunted off and replaced by a fresh one, the whole train was coupled up and our journey towards Dimapur proceeded. For the first mile the pace was very slow, for all the men

walked along the side of the tracks picking up the jettisoned ammunition and loading it in the fresh wagon now at the end of the train. After a brief stop for tidying up and checking of the collected ammunition, the troops entrained and in quick time we were on our way to Dimapur. Somewhere in GHQ records in Delhi there will be a report on this incident, for we held a court of enquiry into the incident when we reached Wangjing on the Imphal Plain.

There was another incident on that final run down the line to Dimapur which we did not report to higher authority. The VCOs were in first class compartments complete with the usual *en suite* loos. Jem X, on that last night, opened the loo door in the dark and stepped in. But he had opened the wrong door and he stepped out and into a ditch by the side of the track. He was uninjured and the first anyone knew about it was when he was found to be missing on arrival at Dimapur. He rejoined the next day, but it was bad luck for Jem X that his exploit occurred just before our final training for an air-transported role. I remember the huge grins when, at a briefing to all VCOs and NCOs shortly before we flew from Palel to Meiktila, I commented that it would be a good thing for any *peshab karne wallahs* (those wishing to relieve themselves) to make sure they were going through the right door whilst in flight.

John Maling added that both Donald Blois and Jem X were killed within a few weeks of arrival in Burma.

Imphal Plain (Wangjing), Training: January – February 1945

At Wangjing 99 Bde formed up for its next task — to start with an air-transported move. For reasons of security the battalion was not told until late January 1945 of the Divisional task of attacking Meiktila with 255 Indian Tank Brigade and two Infantry Brigades in a mechanised role, while 99 Brigade remained in the Imphal area until the capture of an airfield eight miles from Meiktila. 99 Brigade was then to fly in with no transport other than two jeeps and trailers for a whole battalion which would then rely on local bullock

carts and any motor transport that Division could make available. The Brigade had 21 Mountain Regiment (3.7" guns with jeep transport) in support.

Intensive training for our air move began. Jungle training was forgotten. Training for fighting in the open paddy fields of Central Burma began. Time was short but spirits high.

One interesting sidelight on this training is provided by Col J B Chaplin in his book *Action in Burma 1942–1945* which deals with the service of 21 Mountain Regiment in that campaign. Writing of the training he says:

During the month [February 1945], the Regiment also had exercises with infantry battalions, on 15 February with 1/3 GR, on 17 February with 6/15 Punjab Regiment and, perhaps the most successful of these, with 1 Sikh Light Infantry on 21 February. John Maling, their CO, and I decided that for this scheme, called KHALSA, we would impress on the Sikhs the importance of infantry getting as close as possible to the fall of the rounds from the supporting guns. The Battalion advanced towards our concentration from the whole Artillery Regiment. John and I, to show how close we could get, led the way but such was their enthusiasm that we had to keep them back. We got to within fifty yards of the fall of shot — the only bits of metal which came back as far as this were the baseplates of the shells, which were blown straight back. The chances of being hit by one were small. In fact 1 Sikh LI suffered one casualty, but learned a lesson and gained confidence which stood them in very good stead later against the Japs.

At this time the officers of the Bn were:

CO	Lt Col W H Barlow-Wheeler	
2 i/c	Maj J D Maling, MC	
Company	Maj D J Ewert	A Coy
Commanders	Maj J A Hett	B Coy
	Capt Macfarlane	C Coy

	Maj M W H Robinson	D Coy from 6/11 Sikh
	Maj D L Blois	Admin Coy
Adjutant	Capt H Whitaker	
Quartermaster	Capt A B Burnett	
MO	Capt B V. Kale, IMS	
Other officers	Capt K P Kalsy	Transport Offr
	Capt F Hepworth	Defence Pl
	Capt Munshi Singh Brar	Mortar Pl
	Lt I B Gardner	Signals Offr
	Lt W P J Cooper	Intell Offr
	(Burma Regt)	
	Lt D L W Jones	Coy Offr, A Coy

3.2 The Battle to retake Burma

At the end of 1944 the front in Burma ran roughly along the line of the River Chindwin in the north and thence along the India–Burma border to the coast. At the second Quebec Conference an operation *Capital* was approved, with the object of an advance by XIV Army (Gen W Slim) to the line Mandalay–Pakokku. This called for IV Corps (Gen Sir Geoffrey Scoones) to concentrate in the Kohima area, advance via Pinleku to the Schwebo area and to link up with 36 British Division, part of the Northern Combat Command Area (Chinese and Americans) advancing south. XXXIII Corps (Gen Sir Montagu Stopford) would cross the Chindwin River further south in the Kalewa area and meet IV Corps in the Schwebo Plain. Both Corps would then wheel south to trap the Japanese forces in the bend of the River Irrawaddy.

The offensive opened on 3rd December, when XXXIII Corps crossed the Chindwin at Kalewa and Mowlaik, and IV Corps at

Sittaung. Japanese resistance was light since Gen Kimura (Burma Area Army), given his parlous supply situation, was not prepared to risk direct confrontation at this early stage.

On 8th December Gen Frank Messervy took command of IV Corps. On 18th December Gen Slim changed his plan: in view of the lack of Japanese resistance he now planned to use XXXIII Corps to deceive the Japanese into thinking that Mandalay was his main objective while IV Corps drove to the key communications centre of Meiktila. Once the upper Irrawaddy had been secured, XIV Army would race south to seize a port, Rangoon or Moulmein, before the monsoon broke in May. Slim termed this plan *Extended Capital* and the first priority was secretly to deploy IV Corps south down the line of the River Manipur until it was opposite Meiktila. During January XXXIII Corps established bridgeheads on the Irawaddy north of Mandalay prior to the mounting of an attack on that city. XXXIII Corps' advance would thus attract the main attention of Japanese forces.

By 15th February 7th Indian Division of IV Corps had seized a bridgehead over the Irawaddy in the Pagan-Nyaungu area near the roads leading to Meiktila. Over the next few days 17 Indian Division (less 99 Brigade and 21 Mountain Regiment), with 255 Indian Tank Brigade under its command, crossed the Irawaddy and assembled in this bridgehead. The force immediately available to Gen Cowan as commander of this 17 Division group consisted of:

- 2 motorised infantry brigades (48 and 63),
- 2 regiments of Sherman tanks (Probyns Horse and Royal Deccan Horse),
- 1 regiment of armoured cars (16 Light Cavalry),
- 1 divisional recce regiment,
- 1 machine gun battalion,
- 2 field and 1 anti-tank regiments of the divisional artillery.

The intention was that this divisional group, strongly supported by close tactical-support aircraft, should move rapidly to capture

Meiktila deep in the Japanese lines of communication and hold that town against all counter-attacks. *En route* to Meiktila 17 Division should capture Thabutkon airstrip, 12 miles north of Meiktila, to allow for the immediate fly-in of 99 Brigade group with supporting arms including 21 Mountain Regiment. All supplies for 17 Division Group were to be delivered by air as it advanced so that no land lines of supply back to the bridgehead need be maintained.

On 21 February Gen 'Punch' Cowan began his advance out of the bridgehead with immediate and rapid success. While 17 Division and 255 Tank Brigade closed in on Meiktila, the Japanese commander at last realised the danger and ordered 168 Infantry Regiment into the defence of Meiktila. He also galvanised the 3,500 strong garrison into constructing strong-points and other defence positions.

The battle for Meiktila began at the end of February, when it was attacked from four directions and by nightfall on 28th the town was surrounded. The Japanese resisted tenaciously, but were worn down by coordinated assaults by air, tanks and infantry: after fierce fighting, the town eventually fell on 3rd March after all the garrison had been killed.

This provoked a frenzied reaction from Gen Kimura, commanding the Burma Area Army. The 33rd Army, under Gen Honda, was ordered to move southwards at full speed, and to recapture Meiktila at all costs. Meanwhile 99 Brigade Group began flying into Thabutkon airstrip on 28th February. The Brigade consisted of HQ, C Coy, 6/9 Jat Regt. (Div Recce Regt), 6/15 Punjab Regt, 1st Bn Sikh LI, 1/3 Gurkha Rifles, D Coy, 9/13 Frontier Force Rifles (MMGs), 88 Anti-tank Battery, 21 Mountain Regiment, Tehri Garhwal Field Company (Engineers) and other units. Conditions on the airfield were hectic; it took a total of 353 sorties to land 99 Bde, totalling some 4,350 men plus weapons and stores. Luckily there was very little opposition. The battalion, commanded by Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler, flew out from Palel on 28th February in

American Air Force transport aircraft — a mixture of C47s (Dakota) and C46s (Commandos). For most of our men it was their first flight in an aircraft and many were the cases of air sickness, not helped on at least one aircraft when the friendly American crew made toffee on a primus stove in the cockpit and offered it around — without many takers!

The flight from Palel was about 200 miles flying down the Chindwin, across the Irrawaddy and on to Thabutkon in a flight of about two hours. We had virtually total air superiority over the Japanese so the chances of their fighter aircraft disrupting our fly-in were not high, but we were uncomfortably aware of the vulnerability of the endless stream of slow transport aircraft making their way into the rear areas of the enemy. As we neared Thabutkon we could see Meiktila, 12 miles further south-east, burning as it was shelled by the Division which was held up on the approaches to the city. The whole place was a mass of dust as plane after plane landed at a few seconds' interval, pulled into the side for 5 minutes to unload and then took-off back for the next load. Detachments of American and British Light Anti-Aircraft gunners were preparing positions close to the strip while units of 99 Brigade were moving into deployment areas and digging in or moving off in trucks to support the forward troops.

To top-off all the hectic activity there was a very large air-drop of petrol, ammunition and rations going on, a few hundred yards north of the airstrip, for the remainder of the Division, which had fought its way through to Thabutkon whilst the Japanese closed in behind the Division, cutting its land supply route. There was, in fact, so much activity in the immediate neighbourhood that the roar of battle a few miles further east did not make much impression and everyone got on with deploying and digging-in on the perimeter of the strip. The soil was good for digging fox-holes, the temperature pleasantly warm after a very hot day, and the Japanese did not interfere with our first night in Burma. Once landed the

infantry moved to positions in and around Meiktila.

After the capture and clearance of Meiktila the Division was organised to meet the inevitable Japanese counter-attack. The infantry of 99 Brigade was established in a series of mutually supporting series of *harbours* and *keeps* as shown on the sketch map. 99 Bde were responsible for the keeps, but not for the formation harbours. 1 Sikh LI provided the garrisons for A, B and C keeps, 6/15 Punjab for D keep, 6/7 Rajput (under comd of 99 Bde) for E keep and 1/3 GR for F keep. This enabled the two motorised brigades to be available for more fluid operation with 255 Tank Brigade.

By 5th March the main captured airfield at Meiktila (adjoining the east of D keep) was in full use for landings and take off by our transport aircraft. This increased the flow of supplies and reinforcements as well as facilitating the evacuation of casualties. Later there were days when the Japanese were so close to the airfield, and their shelling of it so considerable, that all landings and take-offs were impossible. On such occasions, fortunately brief, 17 Division existed on parachuted supplies; and casualties built up in the Casualty Clearing Station beside the airfield.

Gen Cowan had decided that passive defence was not the answer to the all-out Japanese attacks. Instead, he organised strong columns of infantry and tanks, heavily supported by the air forces, which left the keeps and harbours to search for and harry Japanese units wherever they were to be found. The severe pressure on the airfields required further reinforcements for the troops, defenders now, of Meiktila. On 15th March 9 Brigade of 5 Indian Division was flown in. This provoked the final desperate Japanese attempt to retake the town, the loss of which was continuing to strangle the flow of men and supplies to their northern 33rd Army. This last attempt also failed, the siege of Meiktila was over, and the remnants of the decimated Japanese units were pulled back to the south.

The pursuit of the routed Japanese was along two main axes; XXXIII Corps (7 and 20 Indian Divisions) along the River

Irrawaddy and IV Corps (5, and 17 Indian Divisions) along the main road and railway that led south from Meiktila. The Japanese made a stand at Pyawbwe, but were pushed aside by 17 Division and its supporting armour. 1 Sikh LI was involved in a fierce battle on 9th April for the high ground overlooking Pyawbwe at Hminlodaung and the road to the south was free. This was the last determined stand by the Japanese and it now became a race against time to reach Rangoon before the monsoon.

Brigades and Divisions leap-frogged forward against fragmented opposition, and on 23rd April 19 Indian Division had reached Toungoo. Six days later 17 Indian Division reached Pegu and on 6th May linked up at Rangoon with 26 Indian Division, which had been landed just south of the city on 2nd May. Some scattered pockets of Japanese forces tried to help other units trapped to the west of the Sittang River, but to no avail. Many small actions were fought until fighting ceased on 4th August, during which heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy by our troops, local villagers and irregulars from Aung San's Japanese raised Burmese National Army. The fugitives tried to make their way south and east towards Moulmein, before seeking sanctuary in Malaya.

But other events were happening at the same time. On 6th August an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and on 9th August a second on Nagasaki, in both cases with heavy loss of life. Also on 9th August, Russian troops invaded Manchuria, still occupied by the Japanese, and as a result of all these tremendous blows the Emperor Hirohito broadcast the surrender of Japan on 15th August 1945. The Second World War was finally over.

3.3 The 1st Bn in Burma, the battle of Meiktila: February – April 1945

This account of 1 Sikh LI's activities from 28th February to 10th April was written by Maj Maling in 14th Army Base Hospital at Comilla a few days after he had been wounded at Hminlodaung, just outside Pyawbwe, during the concluding phase of the battle of Meiktila. It was written from memory without access to records and all errors and omissions are regretted. Place names were taken from one-inch-to-one-mile maps:

By the end of January the Battalion had concentrated at Wangjing with 99 Brigade on the Imphal Plain after a somewhat eventful trip from Ranchi. We were very sorry to have to leave Jock Worne and Campbell Austin in hospital, the result of a car accident at New Year.

In Wangjing we at once got down to intensive battle-training, and training for our new role of an air-transported Brigade. Mock-ups and plane manifests rapidly became matters of importance and we watched the continual stream of Dakotas moving over our camp with new interest.

Our month in Wangjing was a happy and healthy one for all ranks, washing and training facilities being of the best and, on the morning of 28th February we at last got the order to move. The Unit was at the top of its form and itching for a fight, and it seemed as if we were going to be really in the middle of things.

The events of our first weeks of action are best told in diary form.

28th February

The Battalion less C Coy and Admin Coy flew from Palel air strip to Thabutkon strip some 13 miles west of Meiktila. It was an awe-inspiring event for all of us to take part in this top speed air move of a Brigade. As each lorry load of men arrived at Palel air strip and saw the Dakotas at work, they realised they were really in the war at last.

The move itself was quick and uneventful except for a high

percentage of air sickness and we were thankful that the Thabutkon strip was well cleared of Japs by the time of our arrival. We could see Meiktila burning in the distance and saw terrific activity on the roads beneath us as we flew in; but on the ground we had only to contend with speeding up our planes' turn-round. The scene on the strip was full of action — Dakotas and Commando planes roaring in with accompanying dust clouds; a Divisional air drop of supplies in progress a few hundred yards away with up to thirty supply planes circling for the drop; AA gunners British and American stripped to the waist and digging feverishly, and the continual flow of MT; infantry and equipment moving from the strip to the Battalion harbours, made a stirring picture.

1st March

Our first night in Burma passed off quietly and we awoke feeling that maybe the war wasn't so close after all. But we were speedily disillusioned; C Coy and our Admin Coy flew in before breakfast without mishap, and a few minutes later the CO was ordered to move the Battalion by MT to take over the defence of Divisional HQ on the outskirts of Meiktila itself.

MT arrived rapidly and we were forced to move on the same basis of loads per lorry as we had used for the fly in, only substituting lorries for planes. There was no time for working out staff-tables and although tactically complicated we found the distribution satisfactory.

By 1230 hrs our leading vehicles were heading for Meiktila, where the sounds of heavy fighting stirred us all. Order and counter order followed in quick succession, but by late evening we were disposed for the defence of Divisional HQ at some 800 yards from Meiktila itself, inside which fierce fighting was going on. A Coy came under command of 48 Brigade and moved out to form a road block at MS (milestone) 342 on the Mandalay road where Jap infiltration had been prevented on the previous evening. D Coy formed a separate box on the lake side at the Pagoda, that was to become known as Able Box. C and B Coys were

disposed of at the north, and Battalion HQ found its protection from HQ and Admin Coys.

At 1700 hrs D Coy was ordered to wipe out a sniper pocket at the Monastery and the first Jap was killed by Jem Udham Singh's platoon a few moments later. The snipers were quickly eliminated and a Jap MMG captured in the mopping up. This was an exhilarating start and was followed by a most satisfactory night during which the Battalion's fire control was noticeably good despite Jap jitter parties on the prowl throughout the night. D Coy found three bodies in front of its position in the morning including an officer, all killed by our grenades.

2nd March

Donald Blois started a successful day for the Battalion by taking out a dawn patrol from Admin Coy old sweats, and presently there were exultant shouts a short distance from the perimeter as the patrol sailed in with the bayonet at a party of three very rash Japs who had decided to have a short sleep too near our positions. These were the first Japs that the majority of our men had seen and their bodies were brought into the Box for a short lying in state. Admin Coy were very pleased with themselves.

The Battalion set about improving defences during the day but there were other notable incidents.

At about 1100 hrs an excited British NCO brought in word of a Jap sniper who had tried to hit him on the main road back to Thabutkon, where the remainder of 99 Brigade was still concentrated. Hepworth at once took a section of the Defence Platoon and set off by truck to settle the sniper. Within 10 minutes he was back in camp with the dead sniper. Hepworth himself gave him the *coup-de-grâce* after a good bit of work by all concerned. On the same afternoon a sniper from across the lake was sniping Divisional HQ, and an SOS was sent to D Coy to deal with him. The greater part of Divisional HQ and many troops then had a grandstand view of a first-class piece of work by Jem Udham Singh's platoon, which moved round the exposed lake side with supreme confidence and shot it out with the sniper at

close range.

A Coy meantime, still on its isolated road block, had contacted an enemy patrol during the morning. Jem Karnail Singh's platoon was ordered out to attack a nearby village in which the patrol was positioned. The attack went well and five Jap bodies were counted, the remainder making off northwards. The day ended with the spirits of the Battalion very high.

3rd March

The night 2nd/3rd March was a disturbed one, with men rather lighter on the trigger than previously. The dawn showed Jap bodies on the Pioneer Platoon's and D Coy's fronts.

A Coy also had an exciting night and suffered some casualties from enemy grenades inside the position.

At dawn A Coy was joined at its position (road block) by a squadron of Sherman tanks, plus some artillery and light armoured cars. This task force was under command of Lt Col Miles Smeeton who had co-operated with us so thoroughly in Ranchi in our Tank and Infantry training. The forces had orders to clear an enemy pocket which was known to be at about MS 344 on the Mandalay road and which had given the armoured cars a nasty knock the day before.

A Coy moved off mounted on the tanks and presently contact was made just west of MS 344. Mortar and 75mm fire was encountered and the leading tank was almost immediately knocked out and set on fire. A very dashing tank attack soon put matters right and A Coy was enabled to overrun the enemy position without further opposition. It was a real tank triumph as three 75mm guns and one 57mm A/Tk gun were found with crews killed, and in addition A Coy found a vast amount of abandoned enemy personal kit, blankets, packs, papers and ammunition. No further opposition was met and A Coy returned to its position without casualties, after a fine demonstration of the tanks' fire power.

Later in the evening A Coy was relieved by 6/15 Punjab regiment. The remainder of the Battalion spent the day

strengthening defences.

4th–13th March

The Battalion less B and D Coys moved into the permanent defences of Meiktila and took over Baker Box at Kyigon. This was an old Japanese bunkered position, but in a very exposed position astride the Mandalay road and the entire layout open to view from the high ground on the Pindale road to our north west, as we found to our cost very shortly. The box was tightly packed with Field Gunners, an Anti-Tank Battery, a light air strip with some five Air OP planes and a company of MMGs. Large supplies of timber and corrugated iron were readily available from ruined houses in the area and everyone set about getting really deep underground as rumour had it that the Japs intended removing us from our positions astride their communications.

The next eight days were ones of constant strengthening of this position, and the two outside boxes Able and Charlie held by D and B Coys respectively. Charlie Box was a cramped company position on the northern edge of the Monastery covering the northern entry into Meiktila. The position smelt strongly of dead Japs despite much cremation by B Coy, and was uncomfortably open to view from the north.

Wiring and digging, with headcover, went on intensively as reports increased of the approach of Jap forces from the north. These reports were by no means vague, as we found that one of our jobs was long distance MT patrolling on the Pindale and Mahlaing roads on both of which the enemy was rapidly concentrating. These patrols were somewhat trying for commanders, as many good ambush positions existed in the scrub, villages and nullahs along the roads, whilst the distance to be covered meant a continual conflict between speed and security.

First contact was made on 8th March, when Hepworth led the Defence Platoon up the Pindale road without armoured escort. At MS 18 the Platoon had just dismounted for a ground search when fire was opened from a range of twenty yards.

Hepworth at once led his Platoon into the charge and this offensive action so surprised the enemy that he fled leaving 18 killed by bayonet and bullet. Enemy supporting positions then opened up from the north and Hepworth ordered a withdrawal to his trucks and thence to camp.

This first-rate little action without loss to ourselves produced valuable information and raised the morale of the Battalion to a high level. The Defence Platoon, who had some lucky escapes, were undoubtedly the happiest people in the Division that night and the confidence bred on that day was shown in their very successful subsequent actions. Capt Kalsy who had accompanied Hepworth on this day in order to see the ground also opened his personal score against the Jap in this attack.

On the same day C Coy contacted a small enemy patrol on the Mahlaing road about MS 18 and obtained information of large parties in this area. A sniper's rifle was captured from the lone Jap killed on this patrol.

A Coy again made contact on 9th March on the Pindale road, when they bumped into strong prepared positions in the MS 18 area. It was now apparent that the Jap was in some force and moving slowly in on Meiktila.

On 10th March C Coy was ordered to patrol as far as MS 17 on the Pindale road and were given two carriers to assist. At about 1530 hrs the leading platoon, in carriers and trucks, reached the northern bank of a wide and dry *chaung* at MS 15 when very heavy fire was opened from the high banks and scrub to the north of the *chaung*; unfortunately Coy HQ and the next platoon were close behind and were caught in the middle of the *chaung* where the sand was so deep that it was impossible to turn vehicles. Very heavy LMG and mortar fire was poured in on the halted convoy and MacFarlane was forced to withdraw to the south bank of the *chaung* and abandon the carriers and lorries which were under fire. A section of 3" mortars which had so gallantly got into action in the middle of the *chaung* without cover, was also forced to abandon its mortars. C Coy's losses were heavy particularly in Coy HQ including CHM Sarwan

Singh.

This reverse was a great blow to the Battalion and was the more of a shock, as up to then we had had matters very much our own way. It also marked the beginning of a week of unpleasant small engagements on the Pindale road during which we suffered heavily.

The enemy was now closing in more rapidly on this road, but the Division was too fully occupied elsewhere to deal the Jap a real blow here. It therefore fell to us to keep contact with the Jap advance at the same time avoiding becoming heavily engaged. This was an unpleasant role and from 11th March our patrols were under constant observation and accurate shelling from enemy 105mm guns. This shelling was particularly severe in the area of MS 4 on the Pindale road, whilst the enemy was establishing forward positions in the Myindawgan Lake area MS5.

On 11th March A Coy and the Sniper Section suffered from this shelling and on 12th March D Coy was heavily engaged by enemy shelling and enemy infantry in the villages west of Myindawgan Lake. D Coy's attack on these villages was beaten off with a number of casualties including Maj Robinson, who was wounded in the arm (luckily a clean hit and he continued to command his company for another month).

On 13th March A Coy was ordered to probe the positions around MS 5 and continued to do so throughout a trying day. They were constantly under close observation, and shell fire followed them at every move. Late in the evening one of our planes was shot down whilst supporting A Coy, and attempts to reach the burning plane were beaten off by enemy fire.

These days of maintaining contact without the means of mounting any attack on the enemy, and constant shelling, had an unnerving effect on the men for a short time.

By 14th March, however, the men had got used to their mounting losses and had learnt that shelling had little effect if one was close enough to the ground. On that date A Coy relieved D Coy in Able Box at the Pagoda and the 1/7

Gurkhas took on the Pindale road patrol.

About 1900 hrs on 14th March Maj Ewert in the Able Box reported that elements of the 1/7 Gurkha Company which had moved up the road, were back in Able Box at the Pagoda after being overrun by Japanese tanks and an infantry company at MS 4½.

Shortly afterwards Maj Ewert saw large bodies of troops moving in threes down the road to his position. Thinking they may be remnants of the Gurkha Company, he went out to the wired entrance and challenged. In reply the approaching troops scattered and opened heavy fire. Maj Ewert was at once hit in the thigh and Jem Jassa Singh accompanying him was fatally wounded in the head. Maj Ewert was able to carry on and throughout the night conducted a very cool and skilful defence against repeated enemy attacks. Enemy tanks were brought up near the perimeter on several occasions but did not assault. The Divisional Artillery gave most heartening support on D/F and SOS tasks, and the Battery of the 1st Indian Field Regt, which was in Baker Box, gave extremely close support under the direction of Maj Ewert. A Coy's performance on this night was notable for the good fire control shown.

The morning of 15th March showed that the enemy was well established on the high ground overlooking Kyigon and the aerodrome, where the 6/15 Punjab and the 1/3 Gurkhas were in position. D Coy, later joined by a company of 1/3 Gurkhas, were ordered to clear the area between Able Box and the bridge, sluice and nullah some 800 yards north of Able Box. This was done at the cost of some twenty casualties, the enemy being strongly entrenched by now all along the northern edge of the sluice nullah. D Coy spent a thoroughly unpleasant day under constant sniping at short range from positions which could not be accurately pinpointed.

A large force of tanks had been ordered to try to clear the area north of the aerodrome on this day, and at about 1100 hrs this force moved through Baker Box along the exposed Mandalay Road. The Japs who had brought up 75mm guns to very close range during the night now opened fire on

Baker Box with everything they had got in the way of artillery: and some 100 shells fell in the Battalion area in a very short time. Our deep bunkers stood us in good stead and casualties were very few, but from that time onwards all movement above ground in Baker Box was of a somewhat furtive nature. Our friends in the Field Gunners had a particularly unpleasant time, as their gun pits were the target for some very heavy concentrations during the next few days, until they were forced to move to more concealed positions.

The 16th and 17th March were notable only for increased enemy shelling both of Baker and Charlie Boxes. B Coy in the latter were fortunate in suffering few casualties despite their cramped and exposed position. A Coy continued to repulse night attacks with success, but on 19th March were unfortunate in suffering heavily during a patrol action near the sluice nullah. A Coy had come under command of the 3/2 Punjab on 17th March, and the position was strengthened by the addition of the Defence Platoon under Hepworth.

On 19th March A Coy were ordered to attempt to pass patrols over the sluice nullah area towards the Mahlaing-Pindale cross-roads. Sub Bawa Singh's platoon attempted this difficult task, but was held up by heavy LMG and Discharger fire as soon as its leading elements were across the nullah. Some thirteen casualties were suffered before the patrol was finally extricated under heavy mortar support. A particularly noteworthy episode was the gallantry of Sep. Balbir Singh (A Coy) who volunteered to bring in a wounded NCO across 200 yards of fire-swept ground. This he did successfully, himself escaping unhurt, to everyone's surprise.

On 17th March the Battalion, less A Coy, had been ordered to concentrate at the aerodrome for offensive operations. This was a cheering bit of news, as the whole Battalion was longing to pay back something to the Jap for the heavy casualties of the past week. Also it would be our first opportunity of acting as one unit in action.

On 18th March we received orders to move in rear of the

1/3 Gurkhas on a Brigade operation to capture Pt. 801, just to the SE of Myindawgan Lake. Our route was to be through the villages to the north of the aerodrome as far as the village Shawbyugan (3138) then west to Pt 801. We expected to be out for 48 hours, and our only transport was two Jeeps both for wireless or intercom purposes. No 3" mortars were to be taken but we received our quota of gunners to assist.

Initial progress by the 1/3 Gurkhas was slow and at about 1100 hrs the Battalion was ordered to move direct to Kandaingbauk from the south, and after its capture to proceed on to Shawbyugan whilst the Gurkhas swept further east.

D Coy moved off first to clear the small village and numerous nullahs south of Kandaingbauk and was soon engaged with snipers in the village area, and on emerging to the north of the small village came into contact with larger forces of enemy who were in temporary positions south west of Kandaingbauk. Jem Udham Singh who had proved himself a first-class leader in action, was unfortunately wounded at this time, and he died from these wounds the following day. Jem Gurdial Singh, who had joined us from the 3rd Battalion some months before, was also severely wounded. Altogether, D Coy casualties in this short encounter totalled approximately fifteen.

Meanwhile on D Coy's right, B Coy had come up to a starting line in a nullah some 800 yards south of Kandaingbauk. They were faced with open paddy country from the start line to the village. A fire plan to cover the company's advance over this exposed ground was prepared and sanctioned and it was only some five minutes before zero that Division reported that the Artillery programme could not be adhered to as the guns were urgently required on another target. In the actual event B Coy's support was therefore limited to a four-minute battery concentration with HE, instead of the anticipated ten minutes, including smoke, by the whole Divisional artillery. As the concentration began B Coy left the start line with great confidence. At once enemy LMGs and dischargers opened up on them and

kept up a murderous fire from the centre and flanks of Kandaingbauk. B Coy never hesitated but continued to advance at a fast pace over the paddy fields suffering heavily as they did so.

In front of the left-hand platoon a small party of Japs was seen to panic and run, quickly pursued by our men. As the Company closed in on the village the fire became more intense and sections were, one by one, pinned to the ground. Attempts to get 2" mortars into action brought heavy retaliatory fire, and attempts to get more artillery support failed as the FOO was killed together with the Company Commander, John Hett, whilst making a reconnaissance from a very exposed position. By this time, in addition to the Coy Commander and FOO, every VCO in the company and every Hav except one, had become casualties, and casualties amongst the men were equally heavy. B Coy had reached to within fifty yards of their objective and were now forced to withdraw across the same fire-swept area. There were many courageous rescue attempts made by the less severely wounded and unwounded at this stage. Sub Mohinder Singh was himself the last to withdraw from the most forward positions and though wounded, he returned to re-organise the Company in a defensive position on the start line.

A platoon of C Coy, led by Jem Bir Singh moved out some time later to recover all possible wounded. This platoon was successful in evacuating a number of men from exposed positions, but the expected smoke cover did not work out as planned and a number of men in the most forward positions had to be left. It was during this rescue period that L/Nk Ajmer Singh of C Coy volunteered for, and carried out, the evacuation of Sub Mehnga Singh from a position covered by sniper and LMGs, and without cover in the area.

The Bn was now called into Bde reserve as the 1/3 Gurkha Rifles had also run into a strong enemy position in the Shawbyugan area and our tank losses were severe. It was eventually decided to withdraw the Bde to the aerodrome again, and we returned about 2100 hrs after an exhausting and distressing day. The Brigadier had a brief word with the

few unwounded survivors of B Coy and told them how fine an attempt they had made to do the impossible, and this was stressed again by the Divisional Commander on the following day.

It was B Coy's first and last attack, as they were amalgamated with D Coy the next day. They had given a most inspiring display of courage and determination, but at a cost that we, as a new Battalion, could not afford.

The next day, 19th March, was a busy one of preparation and re-organisation. Brig Tarver left the Brigade to everyone's intense disappointment and regret; he had proved himself a most efficient commander, and with great sympathy for the Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh, whom he knew and respected. Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler took over temporary command of the Brigade, and Maj J D Maling took command of the Battalion.

On this day we were given orders for a new and very different role from any we had anticipated. We were to move out on a bullock cart and two Jeep basis for an unspecified period to the area east of the Mandalay-Thazi railway line, and from there harass the road Hmyaungu-Oktwin-Hlaingdet down which it was believed the Jap was withdrawing to the Shan States. We were to be direct under Division, and were to obtain maximum information of enemy movements east of the Thazi line, but we were to avoid becoming deeply engaged with the Japanese.

19th March

Two members of the Burma Intelligence Corps were attached to us and proved of immense value, whilst Lt Cooper our Intelligence Officer, with his knowledge of Burmese was also to prove invaluable. Our supplies were to be dropped by air as required, and we were told that the first drop of rations and ammunition was scheduled for 21st March, at Maungmase some twenty miles east of Meiktila, and some two miles south-west of Zawin.

Our bullock-cart transport was very limited and it was a case of humping everything on the men except for the heavy equipment. Kit was cut to the absolute minimum — no

blankets, groundsheets or mosquito nets were taken. Jerseys were, however, carried bundled on carts, and were issued nightly.

Strong parties of Japs were known to be between us at Meiktila and the area where we were to operate, and it was with some misgivings that we set off on 20th March on our long trek. The Battalion had so recently had a serious reverse, and we had no experience of a role of this nature; moreover the Japs were now definitely closing in on Meiktila from all sides. We must therefore be excused for moving off with a certain anxiety as to what the future held for us. We need have had no doubts, every officer and man rose to the occasion superbly, and our fortnight out in the blue was to cost the Jap some 100 killed and 10 MT vehicles destroyed.

Our first encounter was some four miles from Meiktila, where we completely wiped out a Jap patrol of 56 men including three officers and two Jiffs. This was largely the work of Sub Basant Singh's platoon of D Company, though the cordon of A Coy, Defence Platoon and even Battalion HQ also had a share in the killing. It was a cheering sight towards the end of the fight, to see a party of six Japs throw their arms away and run madly away pursued by cheering Sikhs. They were all accounted for. Our own losses were one killed and seventeen wounded, including our Signals Officer Lt Gardner, who was most unluckily wounded while searching those Japanese presumed killed for identifications. (He was shot through the forearm and lost an arm as a result: the Jap was properly dealt with.) The casualties were evacuated by Jeep which returned from Meiktila at speed and by bullock cart which had to be allotted from our already overstrained transport.

As soon as our Jeeps had rejoined, we continued the advance until after dark, when we harboured for the night round a very muddy waterhole, some five miles west of the Thazi railway line. It was a new experience to have a quiet unbroken night and to hear in the distance the battle around Meiktila, with the sky lit up by terrific flashes from the

Gunner Box. We were off again at dawn making for 12R. A and D Coys moved ahead with orders to push on to Maungmase from 12R, and to lay out a dropping-zone and collect our first air drop. The remainder of the Battalion with our painfully slow bullock carts followed on to 12R, where on arrival we found that a company of 6/15th Punjab Regiment. had that night derailed a Jap engine and tender. Our orders were to leave a small detachment at 12R to take over the 6/15th Punjab's role of preventing Jap use of the railway, and to obtain information of Jap movements in the area. Hepworth with the Defence Platoon, reinforced two days late by a platoon of C Coy, took over this role at 12R. From here he blew up the line in several places, kept us accurately informed of Jap movements, and had one set-to with a Jap party of about fifty strong, who unfortunately escaped after an abortive air strike by Thunderbolts, which came in just too soon for his cordon to get into position. Locals in the 12R area were particularly helpful and kept us well supplied with the latest Jap moves.

The Battalion, having dropped off the Defence Platoon, carried on to Maungmase, where our first air drop had been successfully completed. We spent the night well forward at the Fish *nala* some 1500 yards west of Zawin. During the night enemy MT could be clearly heard on the road and it was clear we had work to do at once. The men were unfortunately too noisy. They seemed unaware of the need for complete silence and it was decided to draw back our first harbour to the scrub area south of Maungmase, where on 22nd March we made a strong harbour position in a suitable central spot for raids on the road. It was strange to be back in the jungle scrub again after our long spell in the open, and many were the cases of lost direction. It reminded us all strongly of our patrol training at Raiwalla and we were thankful for that training.

22nd March

The night 22nd–23rd March was spent in patrolling forward to the road and Donald Blois was able to select an ambush position. He reported fairly heavy use of this road, also the

presence of Jap patrols moving continually in the area of the roadside. A further patrol reported enemy positions covering the Okshitkon–Oktwin track. Whilst these parties were out, a Jap patrol paid us a short visit and some grenades were thrown by both sides. In the morning a pool of blood and an officer's sword were found just in front of D Coy's position. We now began a series of quick moves from one position to another, in the hope that the Japs would not be able to concentrate any large forces against us, which seemed a distinct probability as he obviously valued the Oktwin–Hlaingdet road as an escape route. Our next harbour was at the village of Yinmayo, and D Coy with main HQ moved there on the afternoon of 23rd March taking another air drop *en route*. Our lack of adequate transport meant ferrying stores up from the drop to the new box and it was late before all was in. Moreover, we were forced to bury a large quantity of ammunition in our 'box' south of Maungmase, as we were without the means of carrying it. A and C Coys with Battalion Tac HQ stayed in the Maungmase box until late evening on the 23rd March, and then moved up to ambush the road just north of Oktwin. The plan was for Bn Tac HQ and C Coy to form a firm base and RV for A Coy, who were to move up to the road, open on to a wide front, and destroy enemy MT at a point chosen by Donald Blois the previous night. The plan worked well enough, and when A Company had just got into position three lorries came down the road. A terrific fire of PIATs (Projectors, Infantry, Anti-tank), M9A1s (rifle grenades) and LMGs and grenades was opened up on them at point-blank range, and the lorries were completely destroyed in next-to-no-time. The ambush unfortunately had to withdraw before they could search the lorries, but for a start it was very satisfactory. The enemy did not follow up to the RV as had been expected.

The whole party then withdrew reaching the Maungmase area at daybreak. At dawn, there was a most unfortunate accident, the exact cause of which was never discovered. Just as it was getting light there was a tremendous explosion in the middle of C Coy platoon which had bunched in the

thick jungle. Subsequent examinations leads us to think that a PIAT bomb was accidentally exploded, though enemy action cannot be completely ruled out. The result was exceptional, one killed and twenty wounded, many of them most severely, and it was some time before all these were found in the thick jungle and scrub. Evacuation of these casualties had to wait the arrival of Jeeps from Yinmayo, which soon arrived, and by 1000 hrs the whole force, including the wounded, had been concentrated at Yinmayo.

Here we at once got to work to make a light air strip, so that we could fly out the wounded without delay. The local inhabitants co-operated to the full, turning out in large numbers to level the strip, posting sentries in all the trees round about, and even providing additional rations for officers and bullock cart drivers. By 1500 hrs our air strip was ready and soon afterwards eight L5 planes were seen coming in to land. These were single-engined light planes from the US Air Force, all flown by Texan sergeants; they could carry one stretcher and two sitting wounded. It was a most cheering sight and morale was at once raised to see the speed at which casualties could be cleared.

Our admiration for the American pilots of these planes is great, and they worried us when they told us that our strip was a bit tough and bumpy. We promised to have it smooth for their next fly-in on the following day, but it was an anxious time watching each plane off on that first evening.

Next morning, our last casualties were flown out and we showed our appreciation to the Americans by presenting them with a Jap sword and a cavalry carbine. They brought us news too, of the Meiktila battle, which continued to be intense.

24th–25th March

Overnight further patrols confirmed that the road was again in use north of Oktwin, and A Coy less one platoon therefore moved out on the afternoon of 25th March to lay another ambush. This time they were more successful than before and in addition to destroying another three lorries

they also killed at least twenty Japs. The lorries were each filled with at least fifteen to twenty Japs and they were fired on at point-blank range very heavily, so twenty is a conservative estimate. This time the Japs had troops to hand who followed our ambush up for some distance, but without effect. This successful action was again led by Maj Blois. It was now decided to move closer to the road again, to enable more frequent patrols and ambushes to be laid on. Our fighting patrols had been busy in the area north and south of Yinmayo without success, though they gathered considerable information from local inhabitants who gave us most reliable information throughout.

27th–29th March

An air-drop was taken at Yinmayo and on the same evening we moved into a harbour on the nullah north-north-west of Zawin, and on 28th March a recce, in force, of Zawin was made from the north. Our arrival on the northern outskirts of Zawin was unexpected and a number of Japs were seen bathing at a well. The locals however raised the alarm before an attack could be put in, and it was decided not to put in an assault on a forewarned position which we had not been able to reconnoitre. We therefore withdrew to harbour after putting down a 2" mortar barrage on the village, which was reported to have killed eight Japs. It was late in the evening when the withdrawal began and we were not back to harbour until dark.

Our patrols that night were mainly in the Hmyaungu area where considerable movement was reported by Lt Jones who had done some sterling patrols before in this area. As a result of this information supplemented by locals, we were able to direct three heavy air strikes during the day at Hmyaungu, Zawin and Oktwin. The two former air strikes were observed by our daylight patrols from very close range and Sub Basant Singh's patrol managed to bag two Japs making for cover near Hmyaungu; both this patrol and one under Capt Kalsy laid 75 (anti-tank) grenades on the road during the day.

That evening 29th March, we collected another air drop

from Yinmayo and found our long-awaited air photos included in the mail which arrived by light plane at the same time. This plane also brought orders for a further intensification of patrols, as the advance of Divisions from Mandalay made this Oktwin road doubly important to the enemy; the same plane also flew out one of our casualties. MacFarlane relieved Hepworth at 12 R with a platoon of C Coy, Hepworth joining us in the Battalion box.

Maj Robinson took out a party of D Coy on the night of 29–30th March to ambush the road between Hmyaungu and Zawin and to lay 75 grenades on the road. Lt Jones took a recce patrol some miles east of Zawin to locate another track believed to be in use by the Japs.

D Coy's patrol had moved only a short distance from the harbour when it ran into a large Jap patrol halted on the track. The Japs did not wait, with much noise they made off at speed and presently they ran into another of their own parties, for heavy fire and screams and shouts were heard! It is hoped that the two Jap parties had a bloody encounter with each other. D Coy meanwhile moved on only to find that some Japs had tacked themselves on to the rear of their patrol. It was some time before they could be shaken off, but the patrol eventually reached a position beside the road only to find that they had drawn a blank night, with no movement of any sort on the road.

Lt Jones had meanwhile discovered the track east of the road, and although it was daylight by that time, he set off with his recce patrol to see where the track went, and what traffic was on it.

He soon found that the track was in use by Jap bullock carts, and a little north-east of Zawin, he bumped into a Jap patrol which opened fire, and hit Jones in the shoulder. Luckily he was able to keep going and our patrol got back safely with valuable information.

30th March

30th March was spent in moving to a new box further south and in thick jungle; and that night A Coy laid an unsuccessful ambush (fire was opened prematurely), and Hepworth

with his Defence Platoon laid 75 grenades on the track east of the road, without meeting any Japs.

It was decided that D Coy would carry out an ambush south of Oktwin on the night of 31 March – 1 April, whilst a further platoon under Capt Munshi Singh Brar ambushed the track further east. The remainder of the Bn moved to a new box in Maungmase village and took an air drop there, whilst at the same time MacFarlane closed down the 12R position and moved up to join us. On the way out he protected the fly-out of Jones in a light plane and brought on sealed orders, which were brought by this plane, to Bn HQ at Maungmase. Up to that time the intention had been to concentrate the whole Bn and carry out a more offensive role in the Hmyaungu area, where Jap dumps had been located.

The new orders were a bombshell! The Bn was to be concentrated three miles north-east of Thazi by first light next day and to be prepared to occupy Thazi on the following night. We received these orders just as darkness came. D Coy was well out of wireless range on an all-night job and our transport was now 75% unserviceable. Moreover this was our first news of an advance on Thazi by our Division.

The inhabitants of Maungmase promised transport replacements for the next day, so a small party was left there with our mortars and all stores to await D Coy's return, whilst the remainder of the Bn moved.

1st–2nd April

We moved south-west to find a good hiding place before dawn, close enough to Thazi for our role. The country was unknown to us, but by dawn we had found a suitable place in thick jungle scrub near a small lake about 3½ miles north-east of Thazi. Almost at once a Jap patrol of about fifteen strong came straight for our position, and spotted us before our fellows had time to get after them.

D Coy and the transport joined us in our harbour at 1100 hrs and we heard of D Coy's success on the night ambush. They had lain up very close to the road, whilst large parties of Japanese infantry passed at ten yards range, then the

lorries came and another three were bagged and destroyed. In addition some fifteen enemy were killed in the vicinity. The Japs followed up quickly with fire, but we had no casualties. Maj Robinson later in the night took a party forward to the road again and strafed it with 2" mortar and LMG fire, causing considerable confusion.

In our new base NE of Thazi we were somewhat alarmed to hear that 99 Bde's attack from the west was not progressing, as our role was based on a successful and swift advance from that direction. However we persevered with our task of patrolling towards Thazi and the Defence Platoon soon found itself involved with a largish party of enemy holding a village about one mile south of our box. 3" mortar support enabled Hepworth to clear one end of the village, but he had to be recalled to prevent his being too deeply committed. The men were by now extremely tired, many having gone 48 hours without sleep, plus tiring ambushes and long marches with full packs. However, they had a bigger test to come. At 1600 hrs we received orders to give up our role of taking Thazi that night from the east (in fact it fell some weeks later after prolonged assaults by two Brigades) and to concentrate by dawn the next day at Segyi in 99 Bde's area, many miles west of Thazi.

We set off at once, hoping to get well into the range of hills between us and our objectives, before dark came. But the bullock carts just could not make it and darkness found us well on the wrong side of the hills, with a completely unknown stretch of hills and scrub between us and our goal. It was an unpleasant night's march, the map was thoroughly inaccurate and attempts to follow the tracks led us astray time and time again. Many of the men were on their third night operation in succession without sleep and it became increasingly difficult to rouse them after halts. Dawn found us about a mile short of our objectives, and we had gone only a short way on when we realised that we had stumbled through the middle of Jap parties, as a heavy battle broke out just behind us, when the 6/15 Punjab patrols contacted the enemy.

By 0730 hrs we were all safely in Segyi, and rest and tea were obtainable. Looking back over the untracked hills and paddy fields we wondered just how our creaking carts, our Jeeps (one of them on tow) and our weary men, had managed to get there at all. After a few hours in Segyi the Bn moved by MT to take over the defence of the Bde harbour at Pyintha and we found ourselves once again in civilisation and amongst friends, after our fortnight's patrol.

The remainder of the 2nd April and the whole of the 3rd April was spent with one third sleeping, one third washing and one third defending.

It was our first chance to re-organise since our arrival in Meiktila a month before and we were glad to find Capt Ata Mohd with a large batch of reinforcements awaiting us. These recruits had arrived in Meiktila in the thick of the Jap attacks, and had found themselves fighting at once. We were able to make A, C, D and HQ Coys up to full strength, but we had no means of providing the staff for B Coy. This lack of a fourth Company had been much felt already, but was to be much more missed in the week to follow.

Our attempts to sleep in Pyintha were only partially successful, as the entire Divisional Artillery was concentrated around us in an incredibly small area, and it was engaged in supporting the other units of the Bde in a particularly stiff battle just south of Pyintha. The nights brought little respite and we cursed the people who called for D/F and SOS tasks so persistently.

The CO reported to Division on April 3rd, on the results of our patrol and was very pleased to find that the reputation of the Regiment had reached a new high level. It had been a trying time for all concerned, but the men were immensely pleased with what they had accomplished. The greatest credit was certainly due to the Company Commanders and Junior Officers who had been constantly on patrol and in close contact with the Jap.

3.4 Pyawbwe and the 'Tally-Ho' to Rangoon

Maj Maling continues his account:

3rd April

Late in the night we received orders for the advance on Pyawbwe which was the Division's next objective. Our role for the first day was to push on ahead and seize the villages of Kweinge and Kokkogaing some six miles south of Pyintha. This was done without opposition, except for a small party which A Coy cleared out of Kweinge at the double. The Japs left a small dump of equipment at this place, but it was blown up later, presumably by a Jap time bomb. The Battalion moved into harbour in Kweinge for the night 4/5th April and spent a quiet night. We were all saddened to hear that night of the death of Lt Jones. He had left the Casualty Clearing Station in Meiktila on 4th April, his wound having healed. With him he brought large canteen stores for the Mess in his usual generous fashion, and he was determined to join us as soon as possible. He borrowed a Jeep and set out to catch up our advance at once, despite repeated warnings that the roads were mined. He was seen by a Sapper officer, who gave him a last warning. Jones however said he must get through at once and drove on. Soon after this his Jeep was blown up on a Jap mine, and he was found to be dead. This was a great loss to us all, his cheerfulness and real guts had heartened us all before he was wounded, and we had looked forward to his return.

4th April

The late evening was disturbed by reports of enemy movement from the east, and we were much worried concerning a platoon of A Coy which had been sent eastwards to form a patrol base. This platoon under a Subadar was surrounded at dusk by the enemy and was forced to withdraw after a short scrap. Our casualties were light.

5th April

In the morning, A Coy moved out to clear up the situation to the east. An enemy platoon supported by a Battalion Gun

was encountered and driven back after some stiff fighting, in which our 3" mortars and artillery lent a hand. A Coy had half a dozen casualties in this fighting, which were evacuated by an American Field Service other rank who was attached to us. (The American Field Service consisted of Quakers who drove Jeeps, equipped with four stretchers, right up to the front line, but who were not armed.) This was our first experience of the Jap Battalion Gun and we found it very quick to get on to our mortars.

Later that day, we were ordered to move to a position north of Thabebyin village from where we could patrol southwards during the night, and continue our advance in that direction next day. We set off for this harbour late in the afternoon, dropping off D Coy and the Pioneer Platoon at an intermediate position to protect our L of C, which by now was nothing more than a very rough cart track across country. As we moved into our harbour area, a convenient natural position at a nullah junction, we found that the village of Kokkobauk some 800 yards to our right was the target for the Divisional Artillery, followed by the most tremendous volume of tank supporting fire that we had yet heard. It was clear that a full scale attack was being launched by our troops and equally clear that the Jap resistance was strong. 'Overs' began to whistle overhead in ever-increasing numbers, and then just as we began to dig in, our tanks mistook us for the enemy and we came under fairly heavy machine gun fire plus the odd 75mm shell. Luckily it was rapidly getting dark and no damage was done other than two men slightly wounded. The attack on the right petered out and the tanks withdrew leaving us to prepare for what we thought would be a hectic night. To our surprise it was quiet; our patrols under Ata Mohd killed one Jap and our perimeter accounted for two more in the early hours of the morning, whilst we collected a few more bodies on the dawn patrol. Our main concern, however, had been a sudden cloud-burst soon after dark; we were without any protection from the rain of any sort (we had not seen our ground-sheets, mosquito nets or blankets for three weeks)

and our trenches were filled to the brim within half an hour. It was a cold and sleepless night for us all.

6th April

At first light Jem Raja Singh led a platoon of C Coy to clear the thick country immediately to our south. He was soon heavily engaged with the enemy in Thabebyin village and reported back that he had captured a Jap gun. This gun was dragged back to the Battalion box in triumph, our first gun, and a fine 75mm mountain gun in good order.

Jem Raja Singh's platoon was reinforced by the remainder of C Coy under Hepworth, and were ordered to keep the enemy in Thabebyin fully occupied, whilst the Gurkhas put in a full-scale attack on the village of Kokkobauk. At about this time A Coy was ordered to move some five miles south to occupy the village of Kattwinkala, a strategic point on our route south. D Coy had not yet re-joined from its night task on the L of C, and so once again, the odds and sods of Battalion HQ found themselves defending the Battalion Box as on so many occasions before.

D Coy luckily arrived at midday and came into reserve for use in the Thabebyin direction if required. By 1200 hours the Gurkhas had captured Kokkobauk after some solid fighting and permission was received for C Coy to attack Thabebyin.

A squadron of tanks was put at C Coy's disposal and a softening-up of Thabebyin by Divisional Artillery began.

At 1315 hours C Coy assaulted with close tank support and it at once became clear that the village was extremely strongly held. The Gurkhas had placed a company on the enemy's probable escape route and our Defence Platoon was watching the other possible way out. This led to the enemy fighting fanatically, although one party tried to get away to the east but ran into the Defence Platoon; 57 enemy bodies were counted when the Defence Platoon ceased fire. Meanwhile C Coy launched repeated attacks from the north and then from the east into the village. Time and time again their attacks were halted by the Japs who were heavily bunkered in and who had a number of tree snipers also. A platoon of

D Coy was brought up to assist, but throughout the afternoon the main thrust of the attack was from C Coy. Jem Raja Singh was wounded early in the afternoon's attack, but his platoon continued to assault from the east, whilst Sub Pritam Singh II's platoon put in some fine charges from the north. One particular charge, enhanced by loud *fatehs*, routed out thirty Japs from bunkers and they were mown down on the spot. Maj Robinson moving up on the east with his platoon of D Coy had some of the best killing of the day in the nullahs and temporary huts where large parties of Japs had tried to take cover.

By 1730 hrs it was decided to move the Battalion round to a harbour at Pt 607, from where the Jap retreat could be effectively cut. This movement was begun, whilst the Defence Platoon was ordered into a last attempt before dark to clear out an enemy pocket which still held out in the centre of the village. It made a fine start but almost at once came under heavy fire from the bunkers and was only able to clear the south-east edge of the village, where more Japs had taken refuge in the two bush lined ditches. The slaughter here was great.

Nk Munsha Singh who had led the first assault of the Defence Platoon so gallantly, was killed whilst bayoneting a Jap in this area.

As darkness fell, enemy snipers became more bold and it was with difficulty that the whole Battalion (less A Coy) was got into harbour. It had been a great day for the Battalion marred only by our heavy casualties, which were inevitable in such close quarter fighting as had raged all afternoon. During the afternoon a party of Japs, trying to escape had run into C Coy HQ unexpectedly, and had severely wounded Hepworth the Company Commander and fatally wounded Sub Bara Singh. Both were a serious loss to us; Sub Bara Singh was one of our staunchest and most loyal of VCOs and his death was very much felt by us all.

Maj Robinson was fatally wounded in the forehead by a grenade discharger just at the end of the day, while harbouring was in progress. He had made D Coy into our most

efficient killers, and was always noticeable for his offensive spirit. Our other losses (not including A Coy) during the day were twelve killed and forty-four wounded.

7th-9th April

Despite the losses, the Battalion was in great heart on the morning of 7th April, when a further fifteen enemy were killed by patrols around our perimeter. The Japs had finally evacuated Thabebyin during the night, despite our ambushes, and on 7th we carried out a count of the dead. The final count showed 253 Japs in and around Thabebyin. The whole village was a mass of close-packed bunkers and every ditch was filled with dead Japs. Included in our captures were one flamethrower, three MMGs, one 75mm Battalion Gun, ten swords and many pistols, rifles and grenade dischargers. Many valuable documents were also obtained. Unfortunately, we could not complete the collection of equipment, as we were ordered to move at once to join the Brigade some six miles away. Whilst this successful action had been in progress, A Coy away to the south had been having a most difficult time. At 1200 hrs on 6th April Maj Blois had reported Kattwinkala to be held, estimated strength about forty men with two guns. Brigade arranged an immediate air strike followed up by a softening by the guns. A Coy's 48 set was at maximum range and he had difficulty in directing the artillery fire, but eventually a concentration was arranged for 1315 hrs and his attack followed at once. His attack was initially successful, but, having pushed well into the village, he ran into MMGs and bunkers and had to withdraw again. It was a gallant attempt especially as his Company was so far from all support and was typical of the dash shown by Maj Blois since he had taken over A Coy. Our casualties in A Coy were five killed and 20 wounded, making our total casualties for April 6th seventeen killed and 64 wounded, plus one BO killed and one wounded. Included in those killed in A Coy was Jem Karnail Singh, another great loss to us, as he had proved one of our best leaders in action.

A Coy was forced to spend the night in the area of

Kattwinkala. Attempts to evacuate their casualties by 15-cwt trucks were unsuccessful, owing to the trucks meeting a Jap ambush *en route*, including a Jap officer in Burmese clothing. This officer was killed by the Intelligence Hav, No 502 Dumman Singh and his sword brought back to the unit. A number of casualties were however evacuated by tanks. By 1300 hrs on 7th April, we were concentrated at the Brigade Box, and the afternoon was spent in cleaning up and preparing for the next day's dash to the hills just north of Pyawbwe.

Messages of congratulations on the previous day's success were received from the Divisional and Brigade Commanders, and a visit paid to the unit by press representatives. The press representative's photoman remained with us to get action photos on the 8th and 9th. We hope he took advantage of the opportunities we gave him.

We were given a detached role on 8th April; we were to push on some miles beyond the Bde and seize any high ground considered vital for the mounting of an attack on Hminlodaung village. The Bn pushed on in the late evening to the waterless hills north of Pyawbwe, being forced to leave our transport in the rear with the Brigade, owing to the broken ground. By 1800 hrs C Coy was in occupation of Pt 795 directly overlooking the village of Hminlodaung at a range of about 500 yards. Their arrival was most unexpected and flushed Japs were running in all directions as they got to the top. A small killing was made and C Coy, reinforced by the Defence Platoon, at once began digging-in. Ata Mohammed was in charge of C Coy and throughout that evening and night, conducted a very cool defence despite concentrated Jap mortaring and grenading on their exposed hill top position. Cooper got through in a carrier to C Coy, just at dusk, but it was too late to get casualties back and he remained with C Coy. The remainder of the Bn harboured some 1500 yards to the west of C Coy and everyone spent a thirsty night after a march of some fourteen miles. No water was available.

Next day saw our first set piece attack as a Battalion. C

Coy's defence enabled us to make a detailed reconnaissance of the approaches to the village of Hminlodaung, though C Coy's position was still under constant artillery and sniping fire. The CO was given the Divisional Artillery in support, plus two troops of tanks and air strikes as required. The result was a first-class Divisional concentration which saw A Coy on to its first objective unopposed. Another immense concentration followed and D Coy passed through to take the village against only slight opposition. The *fatehs* which swept across the hills as A and D Coys took their objectives were well worth hearing. It was estimated that some fifty enemy were killed in the village area, mostly by artillery and mortar fire. Our casualties mounted after the attack as a well concealed 75mm gun harassed us until nightfall from a position to the south. A Coy, after the capture of the village was ordered to push south to neutralise this gun. It was whilst doing this that the leading troops ran into machine gun fire from some high ground. Maj Blois, who was well forward, was at once killed.

About the same time, the enemy put down some heavy shelling in Battalion HQ area and Lt Cooper was killed instantaneously by a shell splinter in the neck. This gun had the area well ranged and we suffered somewhat heavily. D Coy during its assault had sustained casualties from the same gun. Amongst the first to be hit was Macfarlane who got splinters in each leg. During the day, we had some twenty casualties including two BOs killed and one wounded. The position that we had captured was so dominating and our support had been so complete, that everyone's spirits were very high after this attack.

10th April

In the morning, the enemy gun was still in action to the south, and D Coy moved out to the high ground overlooking the gun area. It was whilst directing covering fire for this advance that Maj Maling was hit in the head by a shell splinter and had to be evacuated.

D Coy successfully cleared the high ground and forced the withdrawal of the enemy gun without casualties.

This concludes Maj Maling's account, but a summary of the officers present shows the casualties suffered.

1 Sikh LI Officers at Meiktila: February–April 1945

Lt Col H Barlow-Wheeler	Commanding Officer appointed Brigade 2 i/c 19 March rejoined Bn at Pyawbwe 10 April
Maj J D Maling, MC	2 i/c Acting CO 19 March–10 April wounded Pyawbwe 10 April
Maj M W H Robinson	Coy Comd wounded Mahlaing Road 12 March killed Thabebyin 6 April
Maj D L Blois	Admin Coy Comd to 14 March A Coy Comd 14 March – 9 April killed Hminlodaung 9 April
Maj J A Hett	B Coy Comd killed Kandaingbauk 18 March
Maj D J Ewert	A Coy Comd wounded Meiktila 14 March
Capt Macfarlane	C Coy Comd to 1 April D Coy Comd to 9 April wounded Pyawbwe 9 April
Capt H Whitaker	Adjutant
Capt F Hepworth	Defence Platoon Comd to 1 April C Coy Comd 1–6 April wounded Thabebyin 6 April
Capt K P Kalsy	Transport Officer to 15 March QM and Admin Coy Comd from 15 March
Capt A B Burnett	QM to approx 15 March evacuated (sick) 15 March

The 1st Bn moves East

Lt I B Gardner	Signals Officer to 20 March wounded E of Meiktila 20 March
Lt Munshi Singh	Mortar Officer to 6 April C Coy Comd 6–7 April
Lt D L W Jones	2 i/c D Coy to 29 March wounded Zawin 29 March killed SE of Meiktila 4 April
Lt W P J Cooper (Burma Regt)	Intelligence Officer to 9 April killed Hminlodaung 9 April
Capt Ata Mohd	joined Bn at Pintha on 2 April C Coy Comd 7–18 April wounded Yamethin 18 April

Summary

Total 16 officers, of whom:

5 killed (2 of whom had been previously wounded)

6 wounded

1 evacuated sick

4 unwounded

All this in a period of some 40 odd days!

After the Pyawbwe battle, Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler returned to command 1 Sikh LI in the absence of Maj John Maling, evacuated wounded. This was followed by the return of Maj J D (Jock) Worne from Ranchi hospital. In addition Maj Gerald Walker (11 Sikh Regt) joined the battalion as a temporary replacement as 2i/c. Capt Ata Mohammed was shortly to be wounded severely at Yamethin on 18th April. Maj D J (Bandy) Ewert rejoined the battalion on 25th April from hospital.

The Battalion then took part in 17 Division's fast mechanised dash towards Rangoon in response to the brief Corps order 'Tally-ho! On to Rangoon!' Japanese resistance was crumbling but the monsoon was breaking. Every form of motor transportation was pressed into service, and 1 Sikh LI was frequently moved on

tank transporters when the tanks themselves were fighting in the advance. Air supply was also hampered by the weather. For a period of several weeks the whole Division was on half rations so that the supply, all by air, could be maintained for petrol and ammunition at the expense of less vital items!

The weather did permit the use of some of the airfields captured in the dash southwards. This enabled some reinforcements to fly in to advanced airfields. At one rain-sodden field North of Pegu the Battalion received Maj Maling, back from hospital in Comilla, Majs Tripathi and V C M Williams from the Regimental Centre together with five other officers (Hunt and Gurpartap Singh from 3 Sikh LI, Farrell from 7/15 Punjab, K Sahai from R Garwhal Rifles and Talbot-Butt from the Gurkhas), and 88 ORs.

These incoming reinforcements were surprised to find themselves among a group of emaciated outgoing British POWs, released from Rangoon jail a few days before, and permitted by the Japanese to make their way North of Pegu.

Farrell soon took over as Adjutant from Capt Harry Whitaker, who became a company commander.

1 Sikh LI was not engaged in any large-scale battles at this time but had frequent patrol encounters during its dash southwards. 17 Division was prevented, by blown bridges and swollen rivers at Pegu, from liberating Rangoon, which fell unopposed to Mountbatten's seaborne and airborne landings. The Division immediately did an about-face and became engaged in preventing the escape eastwards, across the Pegu-Meiktila road, of the large Japanese force trapped between the Irrawady and the Sittang rivers.

1 Sikh LI moved to the Pyu area, Penwagon and Kanyutkwin (between Pegu and Toungoo) for a short period. Fighting patrols towards the Pegu Yomas were frequent but there were few engagements.

It is fitting to close John Maling's account of the battles around Meiktila by reproducing the letter from Maj Gen Cowan, DSO,

MC, Comd, 17 Indian Division to Maj Gen Savory, CB, DSO, MC, MG Infantry, GHQ, New Delhi:

I can best describe them by saying that, in my opinion, the Sikh LI are absolutely first-class.

I never had any doubts about their fighting abilities, but I was afraid that their junior leadership was going to let them down, owing to lack of training and experience. Taken by and large the junior leaders have done extremely well. I am delighted with the Battalion and proud to have them in my Division. They go in at sight, and as fighters are second to none of any troops I have had under my command. They have killed a very large number of Japs and their morale is terrific. Their casualties have been comparatively heavy, but that has not deterred them in any way.

The ambush to which you refer was no ambush at all. I gave them the task of cutting the Jap escape route from Alegan SE of Windwin to Hlaingdet. On the way out to carry out this important task, they encountered a party of Japs who opened fire on them. The Japs were dug in in a village which flanked the route. Without any hesitation the plan, as laid on, went in, the Sikhs under their own supporting fire, attacked the enemy and killed 65; the final killing was done with the bayonet, preceded by a blood-curdling yell. What was left of the Japs ran like hell.

Some of their other attacks have been copy-book ones, going right in under artillery concentration, as close as 70 yards. The Armour, when fighting with them in one of their fierce engagements, was lost in admiration. The culminating point was when the Sikh LI forward troops told the armour to stand back as they were going to finish the party off, and then they proceeded to do so!

Col Price, back in Bareilly as Training Battalion Commandant, was meanwhile anxiously awaiting firm news of how the battalion he had raised was faring in Burma. He knew heavy casualties had been suffered. It must have been a proud moment for him when he received a personal letter, dated 11th April 1945, from the C-in-C,

India. This letter read:

My dear Price,

I have been more than delighted to hear very good accounts of your 1st Battalion from Gen Messervy. He writes, 'I thought you would like to know how wonderfully well the 1st Sikh LI have done in battle. The Div Commander is delighted with them; he says he has never seen better infantry — they have shown tremendous dash and enthusiasm and their spirit is magnificent. Yesterday they killed 264 Japs in a series of difficult village actions. They are rather low in numbers now, both in officers and men. I hope they will be able to be kept up to strength, to carry on the good work they are doing.'

Signed C J E Auchinleck.

3.5 Operations in the Southern Shan States: June–August 1945

In mid-June Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler left the battalion for another appointment and for some three weeks Maj Worne acted as Commanding Officer. During this time 99 Bde received orders to move to Kalaw, East of Thazi in the Southern Shan States with the task of driving the Japanese from that area and eastwards on the axis of the road and railway Kalaw to Taunggyi.

The Battalion moved by MT through Pyawbwe and Thazi to Kalaw, reaching the latter on 18th June. On that day Maj Maling returned from a visit to India to take over the Battalion, a position he held till 1946 when the Bn returned to India.

Kalaw was a pleasant hill station 4,000 feet up from the flat land at Thazi. There were a number of European style buildings left intact by the Japanese, whose nearest positions were now some sixteen miles away to the East.

On 22nd June C and D Coys under Maj Worne carried out a reconnaissance towards Heho at the foot of a jungle-clad ridge half

way to Taunggyi. C Coy came under fire from a position near the landing ground just north of Heho. D Coy found Heho village clear of enemy but patrols on the following day obtained information suggesting there were over 1,000 Japanese in the area running north and south from Heho. One of our patrols played hide-and-seek with a party of men, wearing somewhat strange uniforms which eventually turned out to be members of the Karen Guerillas. This party joined the battalion for one night in our new base near the village of Ingaung, whence it had moved from Kalaw as a result of the C Coy patrol the previous day. The Karen Guerillas, a secret force, was composed of ex-soldiers of the Burma army with British officers — each man a walking arsenal of personal weapons. Our men were very interested to see these strange troops, but their interest was equally shared in the discovery that our new position was being dug in the middle of a crop of peanuts.

The Bn never returned to the comfortable billets of Kalaw. The Brigade with its supporting artillery and engineers joined the Bn in the Ingaung, and then Heho, positions. There were to be several small but fierce encounters with the Japanese during the next month as the Bde attempted to clear the road and rail defile at Heho. Jem Gurdial Singh and two sepoy were killed on 3rd July after some of our men had been wounded the day before.

Life in the Brigade box was not over-comfortable because a new rainy season had begun. Tents and bivouacs were in use for everyone in the box but there were forward positions, on the nearby hills, which were extremely uncomfortable.

The dominant landscape feature whilst in Heho was a jungle-clad ridge running North and South through the empty village of Heho. Just east of that village was a narrow defile through which ran the road and railway line on the way towards Taunggyi. On the eastern side of the Heho defile, the large Inle Lake had its Northern beginnings. This beautiful duck- and reed-covered lake ran south for nearly thirty miles. Numerous small villages inhabited by

fishermen lay on the east and west banks of the lake. Hilly country rose immediately east of the lake. In June 1945 the Japanese had outposts of unknown strength holding the west side of the lake. It was expected that stronger Japanese forces would hold the eastern side north and south through Taunggyi.

It was one of 99 Brigade's tasks whilst operating from Heho, to locate Japanese outpost positions west of the lake. The most memorable of the Bn's fighting patrols during this period was one by A Coy (less one platoon) commanded by Maj Bandy Ewert. This patrol had the task of reconnoitring the area around the town of Indein on the west side of the lake, some 14 miles to the south of Heho. Reports had been received suggesting that there was a Japanese force at Indein as a base for its patrols to the west and north-west towards Kalaw. The possibility of a Japanese counter-attack was always taken seriously. The activities of this patrol are described in the citation for Bandy Ewert's bar to his MC. There were a number of other awards made to this patrol, but unfortunately no record of them exists.

The citation read:

Major Douglas John Ewert, MC 1st Bn Sikh Light Infantry
20 July 1945

On 12 July 45 Major D J Ewert MC was ordered to discover the dispositions and strength of an enemy force, which had been reported in Indein (Southern Shan States). Leaving Heho on the morning of 12 July 45 Major Ewert with two platoons arrived at his firm base position (a mile North of Indein) late in the evening after a long and tiring march.

Major Ewert then gave orders for the defence of the firm base, and he himself with seven men moved off after dark to take up an ambush position between Indein and Taung Kamuk (see note below), both of which places were known to be held. By 0400 hrs 13 July no enemy appeared, so Major Ewert led his small party through difficult hill country to an OP on high ground overlooking Indein from the West. From this view point, only a very short distance from a

Japanese manned OP, Major Ewert was able to observe throughout the whole of 13 July, and to obtain valuable information of enemy movements in Indein.

After dark on 13 July Major Ewert moved North again to the area of his firm base, arriving there after his second rain-soaked night with no sleep. He reached the firm base before dawn, where he received accurate information from a local that the village of Taung Kamuk contained a Jap outpost, thirty strong. The local was also able to describe the exact positions of the enemy sentry groups posted to protect the outpost.

Major Ewert, despite his previous exertions and hardships at once decided to attack this outpost despite the fact that he would not have the protection of darkness. With the utmost skill he personally led his entire force of Coy HQ and two platoons between the enemy sentry posts and up an exposed hill side to within 15 yards of the Kyaung (Buddhist resting place) in which the enemy were resting.

At this stage the enemy could be clearly seen inside the Kyaung going about their morning tasks. Major Ewert disposed his men to cover all possible escape routes of the enemy, except for the route to the South, which he could not reach without exposing his force. This route was moreover so precipitous as to be dangerous to the enemy.

When his whole force was ready Major Ewert, accompanied by two men only, moved forward under the Kyaung, which was on stilts, intending to climb the stairs and spray the enemy occupied room with his Tommy-gun, before the enemy could begin moving out. As Major Ewert was about to climb the stairs an unarmed Japanese soldier suddenly appeared from an outhouse, and managed to raise the alarm. Major Ewert was forced to return to his troops, and very heavy fire was opened by the men of his Company on the Kyanug and on the enemy as they attempted to escape. The Japanese, in their panic, abandoned all but their rifles and bounded down the stairs and over the precipitous cliff to the South.

Six Japanese bodies were found in the compound of the

Kyaung, and local reports from two reliable sources confirm that others were killed as they went over the cliff.

Major Ewert, who had personally directed fire during this action, at once led parties into the Kyaung building, wherein one LMG, one Grenade Discharger and one sword were found. In addition, documents and sketch maps of the defences of the Indein area were captured, in addition to other identifications.

Having completed his task Major Ewert withdrew his force at speed, having suffered only one casualty during this daring and successful action. Local reports have since confirmed that this action led to the withdrawal of all enemy to the North of the Balu Chaung, and to immediate preparations being made for the evacuation of Indein itself.

Moreover Major Ewert, on return to Heho, was able to give such accurate information of enemy positions in the Indein area, that an immediate air strike was called for, as a result of which further Japanese were killed.

Throughout this arduous 60-hour patrol over previously unreconnoitred country of the greatest difficulty, Major Ewert's enthusiasm, good judgment and disregard for personal danger enabled his force to annihilate a large enemy outpost, and to bring back information of operational importance.

This fine example of fearless leadership closely follows a similar case during the period 1st–3rd July 1945, when Major Ewert with one platoon penetrated several miles behind the enemy defence line in the Heho hills. On that patrol he accounted for one Japanese officer and four other ranks, and provided invaluable information. The activities of that patrol were so disturbing to the Japanese, that they were partly instrumental in causing the enemy to evacuate his strong positions overlooking Heho without any strong resistance.

Throughout the whole of the operations in the Heho area Major Ewert's offensive spirit and ability to overcome natural difficulties to achieve his objects, have been an inspiration to the whole Battalion.

On 25th July, 99 Brigade, including 1 Sikh LI, entered the largely undamaged town of Taunggyi after 1/3 Gurkhas had cleared the area without opposition the day before. The town was not only almost undamaged, it also contained quite a large number of friendly locals living an almost normal life. A large portion of the regiment was billeted in houses though a proportion still had defensive tasks on the brigade perimeter.

The Bn was to stay in Taunggyi until some weeks after the end of the war. The Bn's responsibilities, up to 15th August, were to locate and attack the small Japanese rear parties to the South of Taunggyi. 1/3 Gurkhas had a similar job to the east and north. The British regiment in 99 Brigade (E Yorks) was so run down by repatriation schemes that it was non-operational by this stage. A few small engagements took place, fortunately with very few casualties. The Bn was planning a small-scale attack on an isolated Japanese position some ten miles South of the town when the news of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki broke. On 11th August a signal was received from 4 Corps, and the planning for the attack went on, but with a strong hope that peace might intervene. On 15th August news of Japan's surrender came almost as an anti-climax because celebrations had to be tempered with uncertainty about the reactions of isolated Japanese parties. However the Bn was able to celebrate VJ night with some considerable parties and the loosing off of a lot of ammunition and Very lights.

One social party in Taunggyi about this time stayed in the memories of all who participated. Taunggyi had a fairly large Christian community and its church and church hall had survived the Japanese occupation. One day the officers were invited to attend a party in the church hall. About ten went along dressed in jungle greens complete with revolvers and boots. They were greeted by an all-woman group of Burmese who entertained them to a sticky bun tea followed by a game of Musical Chairs with gramophone accompaniment. It would have been nice to have had a camera to record

that happy and unexpected scene.

The first few weeks of peacetime saw the Bn very busy indeed, for it had the task of assisting the Civil Affairs officers (CAS(B)) to get back control as far South as Loikaw (over 70 miles to the South of Taunggyi). There was no contact in the area with the Japanese who had quickly moved off to their own assembly areas in the South and East. From 16th August the Battalion had been provided with surrender notices in English, to air-drop to any group of Japanese they came across. The same message was going out over the wireless from Army HQ.

The Battalion was lucky enough to have two light aircraft made available for use at the Commanding Officer's discretion. The aircraft were of the type used by Air Ops. for the artillery, and were used for keeping in touch with far-flung companies and platoons which were using diverse means of transport.

Loikaw was at the limit of the Bn's responsibilities, and Lt Col Maling remembers flying down the road from Taunggyi to Loikaw to see the progress being made by troops and locals on the blown road-bridges, then landing on a very small strip at Loikaw for a brief look around with Harry Whitaker, who was commanding the detachment there at the time. He and his troops had been interested to see some of the giraffe-necked Padaung women who lived there. On the way back the pilot took him back to Battalion HQ in Taunggyi via the river leading out of the Inle Lake. On the way they flew at reed-top level and dropped a message on one of our patrols moving in sampans back north.

Suddenly early in September 1945, 1 Sikh LI was ordered to assemble its scattered sub-units and move to Rangoon by MT. The orders were to be prepared to move by sea, from Rangoon to Setse beach just South of Amherst in the Tenasserim area of Southern Burma, on or about 25th September. On arrival in Rangoon the Bn was to come directly under 12th Army for the planning and operation of the move.

The Roll of Honour for the period 28th February to 15th August 1945 was a lengthy one. Of the sixteen officers, five were killed and six wounded, with one evacuated sick and only four unwounded. Six VCOs were killed, together with 86 IORs, and a large number were wounded. A very heavy toll, indicative of the heavy fighting in which the Bn was involved.

3.6 Tenasserim: September 1945 – February 1946

1 Sikh LI's first peacetime operation

1 Sikh LI left Taunggyi on 9th September by MT. Maj Whitaker with his D Company had not reached Taunggyi before the battalion left but soon followed. By 22nd September the Bn was concentrated in Rangoon. Planning for what was called Operation Bisto was in full swing. This operation planned for a landing on Setse beach on the Tenasserim coast 120 miles from Rangoon and a few miles South of Amherst, from six LCTs (Landing Craft Tanks) by a battalion group, called Setse Force, under the command of Lt Col John Maling. The force consisted of 1 Sikh LI, one platoon of Tehri Garwhal engineers, a light ADS from 50 Field ambulance, detachments of signals, Field Hygiene and Burma Intelligence Corps, plus a troop of 20 Animal Transport Company with about 60 mules. In addition the force included 34 members of Civil Affairs Burma (CAS(B)) who were under the Bn's protection whilst they set about establishing the civil administration and law and order in the area south of Moulmein.

Once ashore, the force was to operate directly under 12 Army HQ until 17 Division had moved by road, some three or four weeks later, into Moulmein from the Pegu area. The task of Setse Force was to establish British control over the area south of Moulmein to the Southern boundary of Burma at the 3-Pagodas Pass on the Kwai Railway, thence south-westwards to Ye on the

Tenasserim coast. The Setse Force HQ was to be at Thanbyuzayat which was the point where the Japanese-built railway from Siam joined the long existing Burmese railway to Moulmein and Rangoon. It was known that the Japanese had two Independent Mixed Brigades (IMBs), 24 and 72 IMBs, in the area. It was also known that these two IMBs were now, after the Japanese surrender on 15th August, guarding the various ammunition dumps, positions along the line of the railway North and South of Thanbyuzayat, from infiltration by Burmese dacoits. The Japanese would have to guard their dumps until CAS(B) control was complete.

A reconnaissance of Setse beach had been made by a Col from 12 Army HQ accompanied by Maj Bandy Ewert about a week prior to Operation Bistro. This recce was to determine how suitable Setse was to receive LCTs, to make contact with the Japanese staff and issue orders for Japanese assistance after landing. Bandy Ewert's description of the start of this recce depended on whether he was being debriefed by 12 Army HQ or by his friends in the Sikh LI. In the latter case he could be frank and his story was as follows:

A Royal Navy frigate carried the two British officers to an off-shore position opposite Setse. A rubber dinghy was launched with the two officers and two sailors aboard. As the rubber dinghy approached the shore it was clear that a largish collection of senior Japanese were drawn up to receive the visitors from the sea. The Red-Hatted British colonel said to Bandy, as the dinghy came through the surf, 'We must stand up to receive the Japanese salute.' Whereupon the Col stood up, fell forward in the dinghy as it bucked in a small wave, his hat fell off into the water and the hat was handed to the Col as he stepped ashore by a bowing Nip. Bandy Ewert, who had prudently remained sitting, told us that this incident 'took some of the gloss off the proceedings!'

Setse Force's first wave embarked in 5 LCTs at Rangoon on 25th

September and set sail in the evening of that day. The course lay down the Rangoon River to its mouth, then south-eastwards in the Gulf of Martaban. It was the first time that the majority of the Sikhs had ever seen the sea. Fortunately a calm night followed so that there was little sea sickness, only the discomfort of sitting or lying with full Field Service Marching Order in tightly packed conditions.

The next morning, 26th September, landing was made on the excellent sandy beach at Setse, twelve miles from Thanbyuzayat. Troops, vehicles and mules disembarked without difficulty into three feet of water. The first formal contact with Japanese staff officers took place at the village of Sangyi, some three miles from Setse. On this occasion, as on all subsequent contacts with the Japanese, their behaviour was very correct. (A group of Japanese troops were at hand to assist in any way the Bn might require.)

On this first meeting there were present senior staff officers from the Japanese Burma Area Army HQ (BAA) at Mudon, 20 miles south of Moulmein, and from 24 and 72 IMBs. At this meeting it was decided that all orders for the Japanese formations in the area would be passed through Lt Col Maling, as the Officer Commanding Setse Force, to Col Horiba, senior staff officer of 24 IMB, who was camped near the intended Setse Force HQ at Thanbyuzayat. Col Maling was to see Col Horiba almost every day for the next four months when he visited the Sikh LI to receive his orders. He knew a great deal about the area from Thanbyuzayat to the 3-Pagodas Pass, for his IMB had been preparing the defences in this area for some time before the surrender on 15th August. Horiba spoke good English, and Maling had the assistance of an attached Nisei (an American with Japanese parenthood) sergeant when talking to him. Horiba was a tough, humourless man who did his very best to lighten the sometimes heavy tasks demanded of the Japanese prisoners.

At Thanbyuzayat Setse Force had a great number and variety of

tasks needing attention. There were, in the Force area, a little under 8,200 Japanese troops. The most exciting feature of the Bn's job was undoubtedly the responsibility for the whole of the Burma portion of the now infamous River Kwai railway. Thanbyuzayat was at the head of the section built from the Siam border, at 3-Pagodas Pass to where it joined the existing rail system running to Moulmein and Northwards.

Setse Force took over six Diesel railway engines, one wood burning engine and two motor trolleys plus a number of carriages, all based at Thanbyuzayat Railway station. The Force was thus able to cover the whole of its sector of line with rail-borne patrols. It was a fascinating means of travel. The Japanese crew of driver, stoker and general helper would drive the engine on command. The Japanese who operated the points, and such signals as existed, would bow politely as units moved out in the carriages or open box-cars. As a means of transporting long-distance patrols to the Siam border the trains were invaluable. They also provided a very exciting means of transport for, once out of the flat unjungled area near Thanbyuzayat, the flimsy wooden bridges became more frequent. The jungle pressed in beside the wavy lines and unstable sleepers. Sharp curves and deep cuttings added to the constant feeling that one could soon join the old wrecked railway equipment resting on the trees or in chaungs at intervals along the way.

The Force's particular stretch of railway line from Thanbyuzayat to 3-Pagodas Pass was run under 1 Sikh LI orders by No 9 Japanese Railway Regiment. It had its HQ at Thanbyuzayat, which was one of the very few railway stations which actually had a railway station recognisable as such. The very good 1" to the mile maps, 1945 edition by courtesy of Survey HQ 12 Army, showed railway stations every few miles. These were in reality just old POW camp sites with unloading areas and sometimes a siding or loop.

The Japanese had time, between 15th August and the arrival of

Setse Force at the end of September, to clear up the worst of the old camp sites and POW burial grounds. There were still some awful reminders of the sufferings of the prisoners under Japanese control. At one point near Retphaw (or Retpu, as the Japanese and POWs called it), 20 miles down the line from Thanbyuzayat, there was a Japanese-made notice 'Allied POW cemetery, 100 yards'. At the end of a short jungle track was a clearing, a little bigger than a billiard table with about 750 small crosses in it.

'Retpu' had at one time between 1942 and 1944, been a POW hospital. There were other mass graves along the railway, but at Thanbyuzayat there was a very large and more conventional cemetery which had been dug and cared for by Australian POWs. Quite close to the Thanbyuzayat cemetery was a large notice board, erected by either the Japanese or Burmese, recording the fact that many thousands of members of the Burmese civilian labour corps had died working on the railway. It was only many years after the war that the book *Military Administration in the Far East 1943-1946* (by F S V Donnison) suggested a death ratio amongst the 175,000 Burmese labourers on the railway of about 3 in every 7, or 70,000 dead.

When 17 Division eventually reached Moulmein, 1 Sikh LI remained at Thanbyuzayat, and with responsibility for the area to the south as far as the Siam border including all Japanese camps remaining there. Lt Col Maling had some special memories of incidents concerning the Japanese army:

One is a report by one of our patrols which visited Burmese villages near Thanbyuzayat and found two Japanese soldiers in a village at night. The Japs knew they would be punished and when the patrol had cornered them in a field, they lay down on the ground, one on top of the other, and pulled the pin of a grenade between their bodies. When I told Col Horiba of this he told me that those men 'would have lost their *surrendered personnel* status and would have become POWs — and that would have been intolerable for them.'

This may have sounded like semantics to us, but the Japs would have been still influenced by an instruction of Tojo, their Army Minister, in 1941, written into the Japanese Field Service Code, stating: 'Do not be taken prisoner alive.'

However there was a case when one of our patrols did catch two Jap soldiers out of their military camp. These two Japs were brought to my HQ I showed them to Col Horiba and said that if those two soldiers had been in my battalion I would have given them 10 days imprisonment. Horiba asked me if I would make them POWs rather than *surrendered personnel*. I said I would not, but that I would like the Japs themselves to imprison these two within their own camp. That evening I visited Horiba in his camp and was shown the two soldiers whom Horiba had taken with him. They had been placed in a bamboo cage six feet long by three feet high and three feet wide and, said Horiba, they would remain there for 10 days, allowed out for short visits to the latrines and a short spell of exercise each day. I cannot remember how long we let this go on for, but it did make me realise that a fair amount of the harsh treatment of Allied POWs by the Japanese came from the hard treatment of their own troops.

Another incident concerning our contacts with the Japanese came when we were ordered to arrest a certain Jap Captain who was in the Jap camp at Nikhe a few miles into Siam. I decided to go with a platoon of Sikh LI to Nikhe for this venture for I wished to see 3-Pagodas Pass and the Siamese end of the railway. After the usual exhilarating and scary journey down the line, we were met at the Nikhe stopping point by the Japanese Commandant who said that he was sorry but the Capt was dead. I asked why this had happened and the Commandant said that they had been told, the day before, that the Capt was to be arrested and he had committed hara-kiri. When I said I wished to see the Capt, even if he was dead, I was taken through the Jap camp to the Capt's living place, a flattened terrace of earth, where he was tidily laid out with his personal kit beside him and some incense burning and some small vases of flowers. He was certainly dead

but there was no means of identifying him as the wanted man. I accepted the Commandant's assurance that the dead man was the one I had come out to arrest, and was given some identifying material to send to Bangkok. I asked how the Capt knew we were coming to get him and was told that British HQ in Bangkok had sent a message the day before so that the Capt would be ready for our arrival! It seems extraordinary that telephone communication was kept open along the railway, but it was necessary so that the Japs could advise us of dacoit attacks to seize their arms and also so that we could operate the railway more safely. This Capt was wanted for questioning by the War Crimes Tribunal.

That visit to Nikhe to arrest the Capt had an amusing sequel. For some reason or other I decided that we should spend the night at Nikhe and told the Commandant I was coming to dinner with him in his rather neat though spartan bamboo basha. The platoon of Sikhs deployed itself for the night beside the basha and augmented its own rations with whatever was locally available. Our chaps were immensely adaptable at this sort of thing. My dinner with the Commandant was as spartan as his basha. He could speak enough English to make it clear that Nikhe was so isolated that the Japs there had been largely left on their own since the surrender. After dinner the Commandant asked me if I would like to hear his gramophone. We drank a glass of Saki as a Bing Crosby record, *Good dog Rover*, was played. I had never heard it before nor have I ever heard it since!

One of the officers who joined the battalion at this time was Bob Almy, who recalled several interesting episodes. At Thanbyuzayat, he remembers going into the Japanese camp to have his teeth seen to by one of their dentists. His only protection in case they became nasty was one sepoy with a Lee-Enfield rifle. He also had to take a patrol, using the railway as the means of transport, through the 3-Pagodas Pass and into Siam. The target of the patrol was the band of dacoits who were causing considerable trouble at the time. They, the patrol, spent the night in some comfort at a Siamese village,

where the headman was extremely hospitable and offered Almy a whisky — *Black and White* whisky, no less. Naturally he accepted, wondering how some of Scotland's finest had found its way to a remote village in Siam. When the bottle was produced he was rather taken aback to see that the label did not show the usual black and white scotties but a pair of black and white kittens! A local brew which doubtless would fall foul of the Trades Description Act in the UK, but which tasted quite all right and did him no harm.

Almy supposes that this patrol might have been unique in two ways. Not only was he one of the first Europeans to travel on the Burma–Siam railway, but also one of the first to drink locally brewed 'Scotch Whisky'.

Another incident involving Almy was more serious. While at Amherst the Bn was given the job of guarding two quite high-ranking Japanese officers who were then to be shipped back to India to stand trial for war crimes. John Maling put him in charge of them overnight, but somehow they managed to give their guards the slip and vanished into the Burmese night. Almy was given a good dressing down and patrols were sent hither and thither into the jungle to find the villains, but all to no avail. They had disappeared without trace. Possibly John Maling was not too concerned. Perhaps he considered that if they were picked up by the Burmese, they would meet a far more grisly fate than at the hands of the authorities in India.

1 Sikh LI remained in Thanbyuzayat until February 1946. Tasks changed very little after 17 Division reached Moulmein. The battalion came under the command of 48 Brigade for the last four months in Burma. Surrender parades of Japanese forces continued. Bn patrols extended their range as far South as Mergui. Amherst became a rest camp for companies for a week each in rotation. 17 Division Christmas cards were sent off, and Lt Talbot-Butt, who had joined the battalion near Pegu in May 1945, was married there.

3.7 Return to India: February 1946

The 1st Bn moved to Rangoon early in February 1946, and Lt Col Maling returned from a Training Centre conference to find it embarked on a ship in Rangoon stream: he went aboard from a launch, and returned to India with the battalion. The battalion arrived in Lahore on or about 6th February and received a considerable welcome from the Training Centre. A few days later there was a parade so that the 1st Battalion could march past the Commandant and make presentations of Japanese swords to Col Price and Sub Maj Jiwan Singh who had both been founding members of the battalion. The Bn also presented the Training Centre, per Sub Maj Sohan Singh, captured Japanese weapons including a 75mm mountain gun and a 6" heavy mortar, which are still proudly displayed at the quarter guard at Fatehgarh.

The Bn remained in Lahore for some weeks before being posted to Sialkot. At this stage large leave parties of men and officers were sent off. Lt Col S Goodchild took command of 1 Sikh LI, and Col Price and Maj Maling set off in March 1946 to see as many as possible of the wounded Sikhs in their home villages or in the hospitals in which some remained. Shortly thereafter on 9th June the Bn moved down to Poona to join the reforming 4th Indian Division (Red Eagles), under the command of Lt Col S Goodchild (14 Punjab Regiment). The Bn took over the guards of Kirkee arsenal and, in addition, the task of railway protection duties along 245 miles of railway line. About this time the Regiment was very pleased to hear that Lt Col Barlow-Wheeler had been awarded the DSO for his service in Burma.

The main officers of the Battalion at this time were:

CO	Lt Col S Goodchild	known as 'Achchha Bachcha'
	Lt Col E C Wall	
2 i/c	Maj E C Wall	

	Maj Shaukat Ali Shah	
Adjutant	Capt A T Cocks	
	Lt Nur ul Huq	
QM	Capt Bhattarcharjee	
Company Commanders	Capt A T Cocks	subsequently Adjutant
	T/Maj G C O'Flynn	
	Capt C M McBride	
	Maj Gurdial Singh	
	Maj Sultan Ali Shah	from 26/11 Sikh Regt
Other officers	Lt R D Almy	
	Lt H J Bromley	
	Lt Mohinder Singh	
MTO	Capt H C T Routley	

HE Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, C-in-C, India visited the Bn on 9th December 1946 and presented awards for gallantry and distinguished service to the following personnel:

Maj J D Maling, MC	DSO
Capt Ata Mohammed	MC
Sub Maj Bachan Singh	MC
Sub Mohinder Singh	MC
Hav Char Singh	IDSM
Sep Ginder Singh	IDSM, CHM
Ajit Singh	MM
Nk Inder Singh	MM
Nk Ajmer Singh	MM
L Nk Banta Singh	MM

Unfortunately Sub Basant Singh was not available to receive his IOM on this occasion. On 31st December 1946 an extract from the supplement of the London Gazette was received:

The King has been graciously pleased to approve that the

The 1st Bn moves East

following be mentioned in recognition of gallant and distinguished service in Burma:

Lt Col (Temp) J D Maling, DSO, MC

Sub Labh Singh

Nk Munsha Singh

L Nk Kartar Singh

Sep Mehar Singh

Sep Tehal Singh

Lt Col Gurkupal Singh (3 Sikh LI) was appointed Commanding Officer in place of Lt Col Wall on 24th September 1947. On 17th November the Bn left Poona for Jullunder Cantt and took over the duties of railway protection Sutlej/Beas.

2nd Bn Sikh Light Infantry in the Middle East 1945–1947

Having sent reinforcements of both officers and men to the 1st Bn in Burma, the 2nd Bn was considerably under-strength when orders were received to move to the Middle East. The officers at that time with the Bn were:

CO	Lt Col G R F Jenney
2 i/c	Maj W A Rumbold
Adjutant	Capt E C Lacey
QM	<i>Not known</i>
Company Commanders	Maj K N Young
	Maj R Crook
	Maj Raghubir Singh Brar
	Maj Tara Singh
	Maj Narrinder Singh
	Capt F E Pearson
Sub Maj	Hon. Capt Mall Singh OBI

In October 1945, the bulk of the Bn entrained at Erode, and had to endure a seven-day journey to Karachi. The stores etc. were embarked at Madras on *HT Varsova* for the sea journey to Karachi. There a draft of three officers from Jungle Warfare Training at Saharanpur joined (2 Lts D J Clarke, J D Hookway and H Walters) with a party of jawans, also from Jungle Training. For the troops on the draft, it was the first time that they had seen the sea (*kala pani*, or black water) and they were fascinated by the waves, and the absence of the other bank.

The journey to the port of Basrah, at the head of the Persian Gulf, was made on the *HT Jaladurga*. It was still quite hot and the ship very crowded, but it was the absence of land for two or three days which caused most concern. Eventually a small island in the Straits of Hormuz was seen, and the ship took on quite a list as the troops crowded to see it. After disembarking at Maquil, the port area of Basrah, the Bn moved to a Transit Camp, in a bare, sandy and featureless area so very different from the jungle from which it had come.

The Bn now drew stores etc. for its new role and this gave rise to a great deal of speculation for, at the end of a very hot summer, all ranks were issued with winter clothing which included thigh length felt boots, leather jerkins, poshteen (sheepskin) mitten-gloves and snow-goggles! Everyone thought that the Staff had finally ‘flipped’, but the Bn was assured that they would ‘be needed where you are going!’ Eventually it became known that the destination was the town of Deir-ez-Zor, and many maps had to be consulted before it could be found, right in the midst of the Syrian Desert on the River Euphrates. It was not at once clear what the Bn might have to do there, but it seemed unlikely that skills learned in Jungle Warfare Training School would figure prominently on the list! And so it turned out.

For the three new officers, promotion — rapid promotion — was the order of the day, and all became captains overnight! Clarke became Mortar Platoon Comdr, Hookway QM and Walters OC HQ Company. The Bn shook itself out for a few days at Basrah and absorbed the draft of reinforcements, before starting the long journey to Deir-ez-Zor by road, troops and stores being carried by a British GT Company. Unfortunately Hookway fell prey to the dreaded ‘Baghdad Belly’ at Baghdad, and spent a week in the Gen Hospital there. The Bn had long since gone on, and he re-joined via a very speedy and comfortable trip on a Nairn bus, which drove non-stop across the desert, not using the roads,

overnight. On arrival at Dez (the universal name for Deir-ez-Zor) he found himself Mortar Platoon Comdr and Capt Clarke QM. It was probably for the best.

The officers of the Bn at this period were:

CO	Lt Col G R F Jenney	
2 i/c	Maj W A Rumbold	
Adjutant	Capt E C Lacey	
QM	Capt J D Hookway (one week)	
	Capt D J Clarke	
Company	Maj K N Young	
Commanders	Maj R Crooks	
	Maj Raghbir Singh Brar	
	Maj Narrinder Singh	
	Maj Tara Singh	
	Maj F E Pearson	
Other officers	Capt Mohinder Singh	MTO
	Capt J D Hookway	Mortar Officer
	Capt H Walters	HQ Coy
Sub Maj	Hony Capt Mall Singh OBI	

4.1 Deir-ez-Zor, Syria: October 1945 – January 1946

There should at this stage be some explanation of why Indian, and some British troops should find themselves, after the end of the War, on duty in a French Protectorate. After the collapse of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire in 1918, there was an urgent need to make fresh political arrangements for the Middle East. Many promises had been made to the Arabs as an inducement to win their support, and after the Armistice the Arabs occupied the region of Syria and, under King Faisal ibn Hussein, declared an independent state with its capital in Damascus. Despite promises made and implied, the Peace Conference at Versailles in 1920 assigned Syria

and Lebanon to French control as a Mandate under the league of Nations: at the same time Palestine became a British Mandate. In Syria especially this caused widespread dissatisfaction to the Syrian people, and from time to time the French had to use military force to support the Mandate.

At the outset of the Second World War and, as a result of the German attack on France through Belgium and Holland, the French Army was rapidly defeated, and the French Government decided to ask for an Armistice. This came into effect on 22nd June 1940, but two days earlier Italian troops invaded the south of France on a small scale, and an Armistice with Italy was signed on 24th June. France was out of the war, but still had numerous colonies and mandated territories overseas. Some declared for the Allied cause by supporting the Free French under Gen de Gaulle, but Syria opted for Vichy France, and soon showed signs of wishing to collaborate with the Axis powers. To add to British problems Raschid Ali, an Iraqi politician in the pay of the Germans, seized power in Iraq and attacked British bases in that country. Troops from India and Palestine rapidly brought the situation under control after severe initial difficulties.

The situation for Britain at that time was precarious. Attacks on Rommel's German and Italian Army in North Africa (*Brevity* and *Battleaxe*) were repulsed, Crete fell after desperate battles with German airborne and seaborne troops, and only in Italian East Africa (Eritrea and Ethiopia) were Allied forces meeting with success. The situation in Vichy-French controlled Syria was still threatening and on 8th June 1941 Allied Forces including Free French commenced an invasion of Syria. The 45,000 French and native troops resisted fiercely, but within a month the whole country had been cleared and the threat of German intervention removed. This was the position up to and just after the end of the Second World War, but again the Syrian population was becoming restive, as the French tried to resume their control through the mandate as

though circumstances had not changed.

Thus towards the end of 1945 the 2nd Bn Sikh LI, fresh from the very short-range world of the jungle track and trying to look like trees, found itself in the midst of the featureless Syrian Desert, where not a tree was to be seen, except by the banks of the River Euphrates! Deir-ez-Zor was a town of some 22,000 inhabitants on the Euphrates, and of strategic importance as the site of the only bridge for some one hundred miles and, as such, a centre of trade. The French authorities had established a regional headquarters there covering the Jezireh, a hard stony area of desert quite different from the soft sand dunes met with in other deserts. There were few if any obstacles to wheeled transport, and the only occupants of the vast areas of desert were the Bedouin Arabs with their black felt tents, camels and often flocks of sheep.

The actual movement into Dez was along the main road running beside the River Euphrates from Aleppo, and the most noteworthy event was reported in the local Army Newsletter: 'Sikh LI – 3, Dez Donkeys – 0', so the local donkeys obviously came off worse, being no match for the Bn's vehicles! The Bn camped by the side of the French aerodrome, on flat ground, and as there were very few permanent buildings all ranks were accommodated in EPIP pattern tents, except the officers who were in 180-pdr ridge tents. These had been dug down two or three feet into the ground, and this gave much more headroom and also helped to reduce the effects of the strong, cold wind which had already begun to blow from the north. Only two permanent buildings had been allocated to the Bn, and these were used as the armoury and the Officers' Mess. There was a small French party still at the aerodrome because when the French were trying to contain Syrian protests about their continued occupation, aircraft were used, in some cases to bomb and machine-gun local protesters. All the aircraft had been withdrawn, but the airstrip could still have been used to land and refuel. There was little if any love lost between the Syrians and the French, and

the main internal-security role of the Bn was to protect the French from the Syrians and enable the French to keep their civil authority in place — but only just — until such time as there would be a final agreement. This was definitely *not* an easy role for the Bn, and particularly for the guard commanders and the like who might at any time be confronted by a situation which could turn into a diplomatic incident. The French were very ‘touchy’ about anything which involved the pride of France and, after their traumatic experience in the war, that was not to be wondered at.

So the Bn settled down to the main tasks: training and familiarisation with the local conditions and guarding French installations. The Bn formed part of 24 Indian Infantry Brigade, and was soon asked to provide a Bde Defence Platoon for Bde HQ. The unit from which the Sikh LI took over was the Kotah Umed State Infantry, a State-Force unit. They were quite smart, but their worth militarily was not certain. It cannot be said that the 2nd Bn Sikh LI was a particularly smart unit at that time, and when for some reason the CO, Lt Col Jenney decided that the Bde Def Pl would be found from Admin Company, a collision was bound to come sooner or later.

One special type of training which had to be instituted very quickly was driver-training. An Indian Infantry Bn on Jungle establishment would have had 12 Jeeps plus trailers, and 52 mules: the Bn now found itself as virtually an Independent Motorised Bn, with a total of no less than 110 vehicles, including motor-cycles and a platoon of Indian-pattern wheeled armoured carriers. The main vehicles were US 2½-ton lorries, sturdy and reliable, which was just as well when *jawans* got hold of them for the first few times. Fortunately the desert was flat and hard, and drivers could practise their skills well away from anyone else! In a surprisingly short period of time sufficient drivers were trained, but fortunately they were not soon put to the test of traffic or difficult-driving conditions. The rifle companies had much training to carry out, and

inspections of Syrian Army weapons (all ex-French), and assistance in training them provided a bit of variety. The Syrians were much impressed by the heavy weapons of the Bn, and the ability of the 3" mortars to come quickly into action and have several bombs in the air at the same time, made a big impression. One Coy was detached from the Bn and sent up towards the Turkish border at a town called Hassetché, almost due north of and some eighty miles from Dez. It was a lonely posting, again guarding French civil and military installations, but there always seemed to be some minor incident which helped to break the monotony.

The only other troops in the area were 291 Bty 79 A Tk Regt RA at Raqqa, the site of another strategic bridge across the Euphrates. If anything, they had the hardest task of all, since the recreational facilities in Syria were almost non-existent. Eventually some AKC films did get out as far as Dez, but sports provided almost the only other form of relaxation. For the officers there was the odd opportunity to shoot on the Jezireh desert; mostly sand-grouse in enormous flocks and herds of fleet gazelle. In both cases they were hunted from vehicles; the former by using shotguns from the open roof of a station-wagon and the latter by using rifles from madly-driven jeeps.

The following report is taken from a 24 Ind Inf Bde Intelligence Summary (No 17 from 19th December 1945 to 2nd January 1946):

Syrian Forces

A very successful rifle and LMG competition was held between 2 Sikh LI and Syrian Army personnel on 21 and 22 Dec. The Syrian team were obviously 'old soldiers' and their shooting was good. However their rifles were in poor condition and they had not been 'zeroed'. It was noticeable that after the first few shots, which went over the target, they quickly altered the point of aim and from then on shot very well. When the Syrian soldiers fired the British Lee-Enfields (No. 4 rifles) they were very surprised by the shock of discharge and their shooting was poor. Their own rifles were

the 1888–1916 model long rifles.

In the LMG competition the Syrians used their FMs, which proved to be extremely accurate firing ‘application’ at 200 metres, due no doubt to their butt-rests. The Syrians fired very well with the Bren. The prizes, which were equally divided between the two teams, were distributed by the Brigade Commander.

A private competition between the Brigade Commander and staff officer and the Commander Syrian troops and staff officer resulted in the British Army winning.

It is quite clear from this account that diplomacy as much as military skills was required from the Bn.

Other snippets from the Intelligence Summary give an idea of the problems the Bn had to face in Syria:

(Dez) It is reported in Deir-ez-Zor that a raid by elements of the Shammar against the Baggara (two Bedouin tribes) took place in the Jezireh. No casualties were reported.

... (Dez) The raiding party from the Shammar is reported by TJFF Mech Regt to have taken 90 camels from the Baggara south of Ras el Ain. There were no casualties.

... (Dez) In a written complaint to the Political Officer, the Mohafez (Mayor) has complained of increased movement in the town by French personnel. The Mohafez pointed out that if this continued he could not be held responsible should any incident occur. In order that this letter should not be used in the event of an incident, and to ensure maximum security with minimum restrictions on French movement, the Political Officer first explained to the Mohafez that the responsibility for any incident or breach of security was a joint Syrian-British one. An informal meeting was then held in the French Mission, OC British troops and Maj Naish (PO) being present, at which Lt Col Huguenet volunteered to ensure minimum journeys to and from the aerodrome, and to give the Mohafez no cause for complaint or reasonable comment. A number of other points were adjusted, and Lt Col Huguenet was most reasonable in his attitude to escorts, and the avoidance of any

possible incident which might mar the usual peaceful relations in Deir-ez-Zor. [It is quite clear from this that someone was 'leaned-on' rather heavily!]

... (Dez) A joint Anglo-Syrian patrol which went out on 5 Dec 1945 consisted of a British Capt (Hookway), a Syrian Lieut., 1 VCO, an interpreter and 10 other IORs, with 9 Syrian Army personnel. The Syrian Army provided two armoured cars, and 2 Sikh LI a jeep and two 15-cwts. The route chosen was Dez – Soukhne – Bir Hafa – Resafe – Raqqa – Dez, a total distance of approx 295 miles.

Extracts from the report on Syrian Army personnel:

The Syrian officer in command seemed to be efficient, although he did not know the route covered. His Sergeant (Hav) was extremely good and seemed to be an old hand at patrolling. Inter-unit discipline seemed rather 'free and easy', although it proved sufficient. Arms were all kept in good condition, vehicles were satisfactory. Regular halts were apparently considered unnecessary and no maintenance was done. Their leading armoured car was inclined to break away from the main body, so that it proved difficult to keep inter-communication between their vehicles and ours. In short, a very efficient little force, except where strict discipline was concerned.

What was actually happening was that whenever the Syrian armoured cars saw a herd of gazelle, they would drive straight at them and chase them in whatever direction. On coming within range of their Hotchkiss light machine gun on the vehicle, they would open automatic fire on the creatures, until several had been killed, gutted and retrieved. They would then rejoin the patrol. Roast gazelle cooked on an open fire in the desert is very good!

(Dez) Shops in the town closed on 2 Jan (1946), as in all other towns in Syria, and a deputation of students called on the Mohafez to complain at the continued presence of foreign troops in the area, and to complain about the Anglo-French agreement. There was no incident and there was no trouble. Shops which opened normally on the

morning of 3 Jan were ordered by officious students to close again, and did.

By late November – early December it was obvious that things were starting to move. The Bn was ordered to dispose of large stocks of French aircraft bombs, of all types and sizes up to 500 kg or one half ton. These were carted to a number of narrow ravines which ran down from the escarpment some three miles away from the aerodrome and the Bn lines, and, in a series of explosions, were more or less destroyed. One larger than normal blast blew open the door of the CO's billet! A very large number of detonators were extremely difficult to dispose of.

Long-serving British officers from British service were by this time becoming eligible for Demob. and just before Christmas 1945 Capt Lacey left for UK. Capt Hookway took over as Adjutant. This led to a confrontation on the morning of Boxing Day outside the French Mission in Dez. The Adjt had just arrived to inspect the guard when he was made aware that the Bde Comd Brig McCullum and his BM Maj Stephenson had also arrived for the same purpose. After a period of one-sided discussion the following questions were posed: 'How old are you?'; 'How long have you been commissioned?'; and 'How long have you been Adjutant?' to which the answers were: 'Nineteen and a half'; 'Seven months'; and 'Two days'. The tone of the meeting improved considerably after that, and the difficulties tended to lessen.

Probably the most dangerous event to take place at Dez was the Christmas Day hockey match between the officers and a selection of the toughest VCOs. Unfortunately, for some reason never fully explained, the VCOs were first entertained to drinks in the Officers Mess. The arrangements were simple: one bottle of every drink behind the bar (and there were a goodly number, including very exotic ones) was poured into a large metal bath, thoroughly stirred and then served out in pint mugs until it had all gone. This should have been followed by an afternoon on the bed, but instead

the most lethal hockey match was played. All the rules went straight out of the window, no score was kept and a proper referee would have sent most of the players off the pitch!

This was the extent of the Christmas celebrations, except that rum was issued to the troops who, in the bitterly cold weather, consumed it eagerly. Then it was business as usual, but the officers were entertained by the fine singing of some of the French Air-Force personnel, who were obviously very homesick, as we all were. Then the Bn was on the move, as described in the Bde Int Summary:

The Anglo-French military evacuation of the Jezireh began on 22 Jan and had proceeded without incident : Ras el Ain and Qamichliye were both evacuated, the last British soldier leaving with the last Frenchman, as in the terms of the agreement. Hassetché will be evacuated by 6 Feb, when the TJFF (Trans-Jordan Frontier Force) Mech Regt will be concentrated at Deir-ez-Zor with a detachment at Raqqa. . . . Deir-ez-Zor has welcomed the evacuation no less than the Jezireh, but there has been some regret that the British are going. An official reception and tea party given to the Bde Comd and his officers by the Municipality, and a dinner and dance given by the Syrian officers were indications of the friendly Anglo-Syrian relations which have existed in East Syria since the 'troubles' and the British occupation. A farewell party given by the Bde Comd and staff was no less successful.

Anglo-French relations in this area have always been most cordial, and at a dinner party given by the Bde Comd, Lt Col Huguenet announced that there would be no 'broken plates' in the town for the Bde Comd to have to come back and mend. . . . The building in the centre of town previously used as the French Delegation would be evacuated and handed back to the Municipality. The Mohafez showed great pleasure at this move . . . with the stand-down of the British guard on duty, was regarded with great favour by the townspeople, who saw for the first time since the 'troubles' a concrete proof that the French were on the move, and that

the British were seeing fair play all round.

Col Huguenet stated that he did not expect to be in Deir-ez-Zor much longer. His departure would, of course, be regarded with immense enthusiasm in the town, since he is alleged to have been responsible for the order to bomb the town.

2 Sikh LI (under comd 24 Ind Inf Bde) have taken over guard duties at Lattakia, and the CO of the Bn has taken over the duties of OC British Troops, Lattakia. One Coy of the Battalion is stationed at Tartous.

4.2 Lattakia, Syria: January–April 1946

Lattakia was a very different station in every way from Deir-ez-Zor. Situated on the northern coast of Syria, just below the Turkish border, it was a prosperous port of some 25,000 inhabitants, with modern houses and streets. Whereas the Bn was located well outside the town at Dez, in Lattakia the detachments were right in the middle of town, and the main barracks were purpose-built and much superior to the tents on the windy aerodrome. There was a Bn of French Colonial troops, in the barracks immediately adjacent to 2 Sikh LI, local Alouites from the Lebanese mountains. They had their regimental whores with them who used to sun themselves *en deshabille* over the other side of the wire. The *jawans* spent much time looking back the other way!

There was a much greater French presence in Lattakia, and frequent visits by military and diplomatic officers from Beyrouth. On one occasion this led to a considerable heightening of tension, as the French said that their man was coming, and the Syrians that he could not. The *jawans* were in the midst of this sort of diplomatic game quite frequently, and it led to requests such as ‘but who is the *dushman* (enemy)?’ It was not always easy to explain that there was not an enemy as such, but only anyone who broke the rather complicated rules or, more simply, didn’t do what you told them to!

On this particular occasion the Bn tried a show of strength by parading the Carrier Platoon, each heavily armed with a Bren light machine-gun and a PIAT anti-tank weapon — range 200 metres if you were very lucky. The carriers paraded for several days until it became apparent that the French had quietly backed down; on the next day, in place of the Sikh LI carriers, the Syrians produced a troop of real armoured cars, mounting real anti-tank guns, which could have blown the carriers away in very short order. With a real sense of humour they followed the exact route the carriers had been taking — and then disappeared back to wherever they had come from.

One of the main tasks of the Bn, apart from protecting French from Syrians and vice-versa, was to escort convoys of French vehicles to their supply bases in the Lebanon, which was much more pro-French and where little trouble was experienced. From time to time the Syrians got a bit restive about this, especially when they thought that too many vehicles were going, or too frequently. Then they would erect a barrier of a strong chain across the road, requiring vehicles to stop and be checked. In the role of impartial troops this could not be allowed to happen, since any little incident might get blown up to a full-scale problem if somebody said or did the wrong thing. The solution was relatively easy: armoured carriers were put at the head and rear of each convoy. The chain was located, rather stupidly, halfway down a long, straight slope, and the leading carrier would switch on its headlights, put weapons through the slits, and motor at top speed towards the chain. The momentum of the carrier would probably have carried the chain away without trouble, but the Syrians didn't wait to find out. At the last moment they would drop the chain, and stand back as the convoy rushed past. It would have been another matter if they had had an armoured car or two.

The Bn took over duties in Lattakia from a Gurkha Bn (almost certainly 2/6th Gurkha Rifles), and this gave rise to an interesting

phenomenon. It appeared that the local young ladies, seeing the small size of the Gurkhas, thought that they were only boys and hence not capable of In this they were very wrong and, after the Gurkhas had left, there were a number of small, rather dusky babies in the town. There were no such misconceptions about our *jawans*! Rather, they were reliably credited with being baby-eaters, and young children would be hustled off the streets when even only one of our troops approached. In addition, the detachments' cookhouses were often on waste ground near the guard posts; on at least one occasion the kerosene cooker blew-up in a sheet of flames, leading to the further report that the men were fire-worshippers too. Needless to say, the rumours were not contradicted, and the Bn never had any trouble from the local *badmash* or wrong-doers. The language problems were often quite severe, and several interpreters were attached to the Bn. They were almost all Armenians, and could speak eight or ten languages, the chief ones being French (for the French, and Syrian officials), Arabic (for the locals) and of course English.

Soon after the Bn had arrived at Lattakia, a draft of reinforcements was received from the Regimental Centre at Lahore. They included Maj R P Watkin, and 2 Lts W D Purdie and J G Rice. Lt Purdie was appointed Signals Officer and Lt Rice was posted to Bde HQ at Aleppo as Bde Transport Officer. An unusual opportunity occurred for a party of IORs from the Bn to go to the UK for a short leave: the main comments on return was how green everything was (not surprising, as it was winter in UK and anything would look green after the desert at Dez). One other comment was about the honesty of ordinary people: a paper-seller had left his pile of papers and the *jawans* waited to see them all stolen. They were amazed to see people picking up papers and putting down the money.

There was another minor problem which reared its head in Lattakia. The area was for centuries a centre of the drugs trade, in

particular hashish, which was grown locally in the mountains and exported, illegally, from the port of Lattakia by sea. It was in the form of a fine, green powder and it was only after the Bn had left Syria that the peculiar behaviour of a small number of the troops was explained. Somehow they had got hold of hashish and must have sniffed it (it was normally smoked in a cigarette); the effect was to make them much slower and less inclined to work, or take part in games etc. The problem disappeared completely as soon as the Bn moved to Iraq.

It was in Lattakia that a tragedy occurred. The second-in-command, Maj Bill Rumbold, died as the result of an accident and was buried in the Military Cemetery at Tripoli. He was replaced by the senior Maj, Ken Young and a short while afterwards Lt Col C W Morris came to take over the Bn as CO from Lt Col Jenney for a short period.

But there were some rather more pleasurable events at Lattakia. A very successful Bn Sports Day was held, and for the officers there was the occasional trip with the French convoy to Beyrouth, acting as OC Escort. Beyrouth in those days was a very smart city with great French influence, and the nearest thing to civilisation anyone was likely to see in that part of the Middle East. No one enquired too closely about time spent in the city, but those who went seemed to enjoy it. There were opportunities for more energetic pastimes. Maj Watkin and Capt Lacey had good fun in Lattakia riding the police horses and drinking Turkish coffee with the Chief of Police. They also took a Jeep and drove over the border into Turkey where the Turkish frontier guards appeared very ready to dispense with formalities for a packet of cigarettes. They visited a very primitive hill village where they were greeted with enthusiasm and the local fire-water. Then, finally and inevitably, the French authorities had to yield to the pressure of the Syrians for Independence, and this was granted on 12th April 1946. Several officers from the Bn were invited as guests to witness the Independence Day

parade in Damascus; it was the only time that we had seen a troop of Boy Scouts with steel helmets, and their leader had a pistol on his belt. The Anglo-French evacuation of Syria and the Lebanon followed immediately. As before, the last British and French units would leave together, in a large convoy, and this gave rise to a very poignant ceremony at the small French garrison at Tartous. The escort from 2 Sikh LI arrived to find the entire garrison drawn up on parade in front of the flag-pole, with a small band at the side. On being told it was time to leave, the French Lt gave his orders, the band played and the French flag, with a pennant showing the Free-French Cross of Lorraine, was slowly lowered for the last time in Syria. The poor officer stood there, flag in his hands and tears streaming down his face. He had no idea of what to do with the flag, so eventually the British officer suggested that it might be passed to him as a souvenir of that very sad occasion. The French Lt agreed, salutes were exchanged and the flag was handed over.

The convoys formed up, but here a problem which had not been foreseen occurred. The Bn drivers had had plenty of space in the desert to practise driving, and the streets of Lattakia were not particularly difficult or crowded. Beyrouth was another matter altogether, especially since no-one had told the drivers about traffic lights! As far as they were concerned they were just pretty lights, but the Syrians and Lebanese had learnt from experience and, if in doubt, they gave way to the Bn's vehicles.

There was an amusing incident with an officer of the French Colonial Infantry Bn which had lines adjoining ours in Lattakia. They had to be escorted out of Syria by the Sikh LI and an armoured car escort provided by the Jodhpur Lancers. It was feared that the French might get shot up by the Syrians on the way. The order of march was Sikh LI advance and rear-guards, with the main body and French in between, and armoured cars dispersed here and there along the column. The French OC complained that the French should by rights be the last to leave Syria. The security

problem was explained to him, also that the Sikh LI were responsible, but it was agreed that the French could make a token *last to leave* by the presence of one officer. The last that was seen of him was over the tail of the column at the roadside, peeing into a bush! *Vive La France!*

The Bn was soon on the road running across the Lebanese mountains, and then directly eastwards across northern Jordan to Iraq. For one long stretch the road ran through an area covered with football-sized black lava boulders, and in the heat of the sun these radiated the heat to make it almost unbearable. Then it was on to the tarmac desert road in Iraq, where everything gave way to the convoy except the huge pipe-carrying vehicles of the oil company, which drove at speed right on the crown of the road and forced all other users, including the Bn and its carriers, to pull over on to the hard shoulder.

As before, the troops were carried by a British GT company, and they were very impressed by the arrangements made by Sub Maj Mall Singh. He would go ahead of the main convoy with a small party, select a camp site for the night, and then mark out the positions into which the lorries had to be driven, which were marked with small stones. This arranged the lorries exactly one ground-sheet-width apart and, with the minimum of fuss, the Bn would dismount, put up their bivouacs and start preparing a hot drink and a hot meal. The usual way of preparing a hot drink was for each vehicle to carry a smallish tin can, half full of sand. Petrol would be poured on this and carefully ignited, soon boiling the mess-tins or billy-cans for tea. This was almost certainly quite irregular, but everyone did it and no-one seemed to worry.

The driving was terribly monotonous, as the road was completely straight and dead flat. The sun was always on the south or right-hand side, and in open vehicles became quite oppressive. Boredom led to one or two minor accidents through drivers falling asleep at the wheel, and a jeep had to be written off and abandoned

as the Bn was about to enter Baghdad. One other little memory for those who made that trip — the officers' toilets at the small Transit Camp at H2 pumping station! The concrete seats had been covered with gazelle skin, which had not worn well in the very hot weather. The Bn didn't stay long in Baghdad, but turned south for another day's journey to our destination: Shaibah, just to the south-west of Basrah. The troops were not at all sorry to arrive. The actual journey time from Syria to southern Iraq was about five days; and, in those temperatures and with the monotony, it was good to be able to move about on one's own feet again.

4.3 Az Zubeir, Shaibah, Iraq: April 1946 – May/June 1947

After the long drive across the deserts from Syria to the extreme south of Iraq, the Bn was pleased to get into a permanent camp again. In fact, Az Zubeir was an almost non-existent village not far from the very large RAF aerodrome and base at Shaibah. The area was about ten to twelve miles from the sea at Basrah and right out in the desert, with absolutely no vegetation except very straggling tamarisk bushes. In fact it was to prove a blessing that the camp was not close to the sea, as in the hot season the humidity at Shaibah was at least bearable. The temperatures got up to 140 deg. F in the shade at the very hottest time — except that there was rarely any shade of which to take advantage. Nearer the coast the temperatures were significantly lower, but the very high humidity was very trying.

The camp itself was bounded by a high barbed-wire fence, for all the world like a Prisoner-of-War camp, and the huts were wooden, with rush screens over the windows to try to cool things down. It would get extremely cold at night, even in hot weather, and this often posed difficult alternatives for guards and troops on exercises regarding clothing to be worn. The role of the Bn, which was

shared with the 7/11 Sikhs and 2 Mahars, was to guard the enormous Base installations in south Iraq, left over from the days of Allied assistance to the Russians via Persia. The BAD (Base Ammunition Depot), which the Bn often had to guard, was several miles in perimeter, and guards were mounted on jeeps which patrolled the wire fences looking for holes or signs of entry. It was not an idle threat, as the quite possibly true story was that the King David Hotel in Jerusalem was blown up by explosives taken from that BAD, but fortunately not when 2 Sikh LI was on duty!

Numerous other guards had to be found, as well as for the camp itself, and it was usual for one third of the Bn to be on guard-duty on any one day. Some training was possible, but the combination of heat and complete lack of any facilities made life there very trying. The main recreation was sport, and hockey was played frequently. The officers mess tried desperately to grow a small strip of grass in front of the mess, but despite daily watering and all the care possible, the grass just didn't survive. So a small tree was made from wire and camouflage netting, and this was the only green thing for miles around.

Very little was seen of other units, but one source of interest to the *jawans* was the presence of a number of German and Austrian POWs. They would work within the camp, mainly digging the deep latrines at which they were very highly specialised, and they were under minimal if any form of guard. (There was nowhere for them to go.) The troops seemed puzzled to see *dushman* (enemy) at close quarters, and in the normal rig of shorts, boots and forage cap they were not much different from their own British officers. There was on one occasion a visit of a hockey team from the 25th Garrison Bn stationed across the Shatt-al-Arab waterway in Abadan, but apart from this almost nothing. All ranks were greatly tired by unrelenting guard duties, and rest was eagerly taken when it could be.

There was an officers' club in the area, but the total lack of any

female company made it a rather frustrating place to visit. The 2nd Mahars were a very jovial crowd, not too far away down the road to Basrah, and some convivial evenings were arranged between the Messes.

There were new intakes at the end of summer. 2 Lt E W Carvalho with a draft of twenty men from the Regimental Centre reported on 12th October 1946. They were followed by 2 Lt T Shiner a few weeks later.

The command of the Battalion changed several times in a short period in Iraq; Lt Col C W N Morris being CO from May to September 1946 and Lt Col Mir Afzal from September to November 1946.

The CO, by now Lt Col J H Seagrim (2 Punjab Regiment), was concerned under these conditions for the welfare of his very young officers, and so from time to time an invitation would be issued to the (few) ladies of the Malcolm Club at the RAF base at Shaibah. These ladies were volunteers from the UK who looked after the welfare on the base, and on the evenings before they were due there would be a flurry of cleaning-up done, which was usually desperately needed. There were also occasional and quite illegal visits to the shadier areas of Basrah, in the CO's station wagon, but nobody came to any harm through it.

Col Seagrim came from a military family of five brothers, who between them had a quite incredible record of bravery and service. In age order, Charles (RA) was invalided out from Burma, Cyril (RE) served on the planning staff for D-Day and was awarded the OBE, Derek (Green Howards) won a posthumous VC at the Mareth Line in Tunisia, Jack (2 Punjab) became CO of 2 Sikh LI, and Hugh (Burma Rifles) won a posthumous GC (George Cross, the highest civilian award) for service behind Japanese lines in Burma, surrendering to save the lives of his Karen followers. Truly a remarkable family.

Then, in April 1946 came an event which changed the role of the

Battalion, and very much for the better. There were a series of strikes in the British owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's refineries in Abadan, just across the river from Basrah. These were instigated by the Tudeh Party, led by Doctor Mossadec, which was a communist organisation. This was held to pose a serious threat to British interests in that area, especially as loss of control would threaten the supply of oil to the West. The strike was accompanied by anti-British rioting, and the decision was taken to move a force to Basrah to safeguard the position of the oil and the refinery. Force 401, commanded by Maj Gen F Loftus-Tottenham and consisting of 19 Indian Brigade Group (4 Indian Grenadiers, 3/8 Punjab Regiment and 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles plus supporting elements), was moved from India to the Basrah area to await events. The three battalions already in south Iraq (7/11th Sikhs, 2 Sikh LI and 2 Mahar) also came under command of Force 401, and training began in earnest for a possible role of intervention in Iran.

The first plan was for the Bn to move to Maqil, the port area of Basrah, and load troops, equipment and supplies with a view to unloading at Bandar Shahpur, a port at the head of the Persian Gulf. There were two or three practices of this operation, but someone must then have had second thoughts about the feasibility of unloading a ship, which required cranes and docks, in a country likely to be quite hostile to what was a foreign invasion. So the Bn was transformed into an air-landing role, with the same general task, namely the seizure and retention of the oil wells at Agha Jahri, some eighty miles inside Iran. It was quickly appreciated that the nearest landing strip was at Haft Kel, some fifteen miles from Agha Jahri, and that once landed the Bn would have to move itself, its equipment and supplies on foot to the objective. Not a particularly encouraging thought if resistance were to be expected.

So, having divided the Bn into aircraft loads and worked out that one aircraft load was almost identical to a 2½-ton lorry load, training began. This consisted of loading troops and absolute minimum

equipment into lorries, driving fifteen miles out into the desert, and being told to *make your way to camp*. Wireless sets, 3" mortar components and bombs, and all the other pieces which had to be carried became heavier as the march progressed, and the extreme heat did nothing to make life any easier. But the change from guard duties was welcomed; at least the Bn might have a chance to do something useful, and it did make a change. While the main body was to be air-landed, the Carrier Platoons were to move overland and across the desert.

2 Lt Carvalho was appointed Carrier Pl commander and ordered to report to Maj Sam McCoy, OBE (2 Royal Lancers) and CO Indian Long Range Squadron (ILRS) for six weeks' attachment and training in desert navigation and movement. The ILRS under its present commander was once part of the famed Long Range Desert Group and had contributed to its spectacular success in the Western Desert. They were stationed on Coal Island in the middle of the Shatt-al-Arab at its narrowest, just off Basrah.

While the drivers learned the finer points of coping with various types of desert terrain, the officer, VCO and NCOs concentrated on Sun Compass, Long Range patrolling techniques and reconnaissance. The first attempt at night navigation was an eye-opener. A dark night and the absence of landmarks, proved a disaster and did little for morale and self-respect. A whole night's driving from A, twenty miles to B, found the platoon at dawn, two miles from A and twenty-two miles from B!

However, they learned fast. At sunset during the next exercise, when giving 2 Lt Carvalho an RV for sunrise the following morning, again twenty miles away, Maj McCoy promised to cook him breakfast if he appeared at the crack of dawn! True to his word, Sam McCoy did!!

There certainly was a change for the officers, who now became involved in large signal exercises, with such exotic things as ASSUs (Air Support Signals Units), co-operation with aircraft etc., and

there was much examination of aerial photographs of the target area. There was also a very large-scale battle-inoculation exercise for each battalion, supported by an Indian Field Regiment and the mortar platoons of the three Bns; the mortar bombs were much more impressive, and more scaring, than the 25-pdr shells.

Probably fortunately, the Tudeh Party and the Iranians backed down, and Force 401 never had to go into action, but it would have been an interesting few weeks if something had happened.

Then there seemed to be rather more in the way of general training and rather less guard duties, and the Bn laid on several demonstrations of weapons etc. for a very un-military looking Iraqi Army. There was also the opportunity to carry out Bn exercises, which involved the whole Bn, in vehicles, driving in closed-up formation across the flat, stony desert, and then forming up on the start-line just before dawn and carrying out battalion attacks. (As a matter of general interest, these exercises were just north of the border between Iraq and Kuwait, where some forty years or more later the Iraqi Republican Guard was in battle against the Allied Powers in the Gulf War.)

Being so close to the state of Kuwait while on collective training near Safwan, Maj Jenney, the 2 i/c, suggested a visit over the weekend: the idea caught on and, needing the change, a party of officers and a Mess detachment left on the four-hour trip, heading over the desert in the general direction of the town.

When it appeared on the horizon, they picked up a barely discernible track that led to the capital. The splendour of the Kuwait of today bears no resemblance to the conditions encountered in 1947: a dry and dusty medieval town with narrow streets and not a blade of grass. Currency was based on the Indian rupee and, having purchased sufficient kerosine tins of fresh water at one rupee a tin, the party camped on the beach and spent a very pleasant weekend.

One complete change from the normal routine occurred when it was announced that the Bn would receive an official visit from Maj

Gen Loftus-Tottenham, GOC Force 401. Lt Col Seagrim said that every other unit would put on a tactical exercise, and that all the general would see would be troops' bottoms. So he decided to lay on a full ceremonial parade. A company was borrowed from 25th Garrison Bn, and somehow the band of the Rajputana Rifles was obtained, and the Bn had the first chance for a very long while to smarten up drill and appearance, and to show the general what the M & Rs could do. The parade was agreed to have been a great success, but then it was back to training and guard duties.

A photograph taken after this parade records the officers and VCOs of the 2nd Bn Sikh LI in early 1947:

CO	Lt Col J H Seagrim	
2 i/c	Maj G R F Jenney	
Adjutant	Capt J D Hookway	
QM	Capt D J Clarke	
Company	Maj Raghbir Singh Brar	A Coy
Commanders	Maj Tara Singh	B Coy
	Maj Narrinder Singh	C Coy
	Maj K N Young	D Coy
	Capt H Walters	HQ Coy
	Capt Mohinder Singh	Admin Coy
Other officers	Maj Sterling	att.
	Lt J G Rice	MTO
	Lt K C Hodge	Mortar Pl.
	Lt W D Purdie	Signals officer
	Lt T Leete Int.officer	
	Lt T Shiner	Carrier Pl.
	Lt D J Cooper	att.
Absentees	Lt G Maitland	War leave in India
	Lt A S Anand	Liaison visit to UK

Lt E W Carvalho

3" Mortar
course at Gaza

Medical officer Capt Basaka Menon MO
Sub Maj Sub Maj & Hony Capt
 Mall Singh, OBI
 Sub Maj & Hony Lt
 Puran Singh OBI

from Mar 1947

In March 1947, Sub Maj and Hon Capt Mall Singh OBI, who had been with the Bn since its inception on 1st July 1942 left on what can best be described as a well-earned retirement. He was replaced by another Pioneer stalwart, the legendary Sub Maj and Hon Lt Puran Singh, OBI, a welcome addition to the team.

But now thoughts of the British officers were turning towards leave in the UK of which there were several types:

PYTHON	permanent expatriation for British service;
LIAP	leave in addition to PYTHON (also for British service);
LILOP	leave in lieu of PYTHON (for Indian Army personnel);
SLICK	short leave in UK (28 days)

Soon after that the talk was of demobilisation, as it became more clear that India would be granted Independence in the relatively near future. The senior British officers went first, except for those who had volunteered to stay on for given periods and who were then replaced by newly-commissioned officers from India. Then even quite junior officers were off; they were advised to apply for permanent commissions with the British Army should they so wish. But by then the Infantry was full and only the Royal Artillery or Royal Engineers still had vacancies. It was in 1947 that the pre-war Regular Indian Army officers (British) of the rank of Major and above started going. An example was Maj G C O'Flynn, who transferred to the Royal Artillery in the UK in early 1947.

On the departure to the UK for demobilisation of Capts. Clarke, Hookway and Walters, Capts. Autar Singh Anand and G F Maitland were appointed Adjutant and QM respectively.

With the date for the handover of power decided. GHQ India moved to have as many as possible of the Indian Units serving overseas back in the country by 15th August 1947, Indian Independence Day. The Bn received its movement orders in early July, the news being greeted with enthusiasm and a feeling of relief by the troops, many of whom, depending on the location of their villages, were concerned at the outcome of the impending partition of the country.

It was at this time that the Bn had a visit from Field Marshall Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief, India.

Capt K P Kalsy flew in from India a week before embarkation to boost the depleted officer establishment. After being bade farewell at the port of Maqil by Brig. Wilson-Haffenden of HQ British Troops Iraq, the battalion embarked on *HT Varsova* and sailed for Bombay in the early hours of 4th August 1947.

At this time the officer and VCO establishment was:

CO	Lt Col J H Seagrim	
2i/c	Maj Raghbir Singh Brar	also OC A Coy
Adjt	Capt A S Anand	
QM	Capt G F Maitland	
Coy Comds	Maj Raghbir Singh Brar	A Coy
	Maj Tara Singh	B Coy
	Maj Narrinder Singh	C Coy
	Capt E W Carvalho	D Coy
	Capt K P Kalsy	H Q Coy
	Maj Mohinder Singh	AdminCoy and
		MTO
Med Offr	Capt B Menon, AMC	RMO
Sub Maj	Sub Maj & Hony Lt	

Puran Singh, SB, OBI

VCOs	Sub Harnam Singh	A Coy
	Sub Chattar Singh	B Coy
	Sub Bujha Singh	C Coy
	Sub Hari Singh	D Coy.
	Sub Bachan Singh	Sig Pl
	Sub Mehta Singh	MT Pl
	Jem Ujjagur Singh	Jem Adjt
	Jem Waryam Singh	Jem Head Clerk

The voyage was uneventful, and the ship made good time, docking at Bombay on 10th August, a day earlier than expected by HQ Embarkation.

The Bn was destined for Dhond, a rather isolated cantonment 40 miles from Poona that, either during or after the war, had housed a West African Brigade. A train was hastily arranged for the same evening and, while the Bn disembarked, Maj Gen D R Bateman, DSO, GOC Bombay and his GSO 1 arrived to welcome them.

The unit entrained and left for Dhond the same evening; they were given a welcome cup of tea by the 1st Bn during a brief halt at Poona early the following morning. On arrival it transpired that they were the only major unit in the station, later to be joined by a Bn of the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles back from Java. In his capacity of Station Commander, Lt Col Seagrim directed the MES to furnish a building that he had selected to be the Station Club, and it was here that Independence Day was ushered in.

Shortly thereafter, he held a Durbar and announced that he was sending a party comprising an officer, some VCOs and men to the Regimental Centre to assist, if required, in the evacuation of families of troops and bring back the latest information. This was done and proved to be a wise and prudent measure in those troubled times in the Punjab, 1,500 miles away.

In late August the CO and officers drove to Poona to attend an

address by Gen Sir Rob Lockhart, the new C-in-C Indian Army FM Sir Claude Auchinleck now being the Supreme Commander India and Pakistan. After the address they availed themselves of the opportunity to visit the 1st Bn and met Lt Col E B C Wall and some of the officers and VCOs.

Shortly thereafter Maj Balwant Singh, ex 14 Punjab Regiment and an ex-POW in Italy arrived as second-in-command. A few weeks later Lt Col J H Seagrim, the last British CO, handed over to Maj Balwant Singh and left the Bn on 29th September 1947. He insisted on the complete absence of ceremony. After saying good-bye to the officers and VCOs, he inspected the Quarter Guard and was seen on to the train by the new CO and Sub Maj & Hony Lt Puran Singh SB, OBI

Popular with all ranks he had accomplished a great deal in his ten months of command.

So ended a happy chapter, and another commenced.

The Sikh Pioneers and Sikh Light Infantry Association

The Association, for former British officers of the Sikh Pioneers and Sikh LI, their wives and widows, was formed shortly after the War and met once a year, in London. Initially there were always two functions: a Dinner in the evening for Officers only, followed by a Luncheon for Officers and Regimental Ladies the next day.

The first record I have is of the 1950 Reunion, which was held at the Criterion Restaurant, Lower Regent Street, London: the luncheon cost 17/6 (87½ p) and the dinner 19/- (95p). (You wouldn't get much for that nowadays!) The Hon Sec was Lt Col E P F Pearse, and his report shows that 32 Sikh Pioneers and wives and 17 Sikh LI and wives attended the luncheon and 22 and 19 respectively the dinner.

The 1953 Reunion, held at the Junior United Service Club, was memorable for the presence of their Highnesses the Raja and Ranee of Faridkote with their son, David and second daughter at the luncheon, and again of His Highness and his ADC at the dinner. General Savory took the chair at the dinner and Maj Gen Alfieri at the luncheon. Maj Gen 'Punch' Cowan, who commanded 17 Division in which 1 Sikh LI served with great distinction in Burma was prevented by ill-health from attending.

In 1957 Gen Savory and Air Commodore 'Bertie' Drew were in the chair at the luncheon and dinner respectively. Guests included FM Sir Claude Auchinleck and Brig Sir John Hunt. Sikh Pioneer and Sikh LI representation was 46 and 23 at the luncheon and 17 and 16 at the dinner.

At the 1961 Reunion Mrs Spurgin, (widow of the co-author, with Gen McMunn, of the *History of the Sikh Pioneers*) gave an illustrated talk on her recent tour of India and Pakistan. She was welcomed there by Brig Gurkupal Singh, the Colonel of the Regiment, and met many pensioners: she also visited the 3rd Bn in camp in the Amritsar area and was given a very warm welcome. At the Regimental Centre at Meerut she was welcomed by the Comdt Lt Col Nanda and given an extensive tour. This coincided with the visit of HM the Queen; and Mrs Spurgin attended the Republic Day Parade at which Her Majesty was present. The Sikh LI contingent looked very smart in their green pagris and shining chakras.

The 1963 Reunion, held at the Junior Army and Navy Club for the dinner on Friday night, and at Whitehall Court for the luncheon, was notable in that our Regimental guest at luncheon was FM Viscount Slim, KG, GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE, DSO, MC. Gen Savory also welcomed Gen Misra, who had been a cadet in his Coy at Dehra Dun! One lovely story from this Reunion concerned a Regimental Lady who called a taxi to take her to Paddington station. The driver became very excited, and asked if she knew who was just coming out behind her. 'Oh yes,' she said, 'Field Marshal Slim. He was Guest of Honour at the Reunion I have just come from.' The cabbie said that he had served in 14th Army and thought the world of 'Bill' Slim, and wouldn't take any money for taking her to Paddington! Gen Savory also reminded the guests of the very sad loss the Regiment had suffered by the death of Col Price, who had raised the Sikh LI: he had received a very touching letter from the Regiment expressing the grief of all ranks.

Our Regimental Guests at the 1964 Reunion were Col and Mrs Mohd. Aslam (the Army Adviser to the High Commissioner of Pakistan). Col Aslam had a close association with the 1st Bn Sikh LI: both were in 17 Div at Meiktila, and close support was provided by Jacob's Mountain Battery, which was commanded by him. In reply to the speech of welcome, Col Aslam noted that he was the

third generation of his family to have served in the Mountain Artillery.

These early Reunions were heady affairs, with a mixture of the 'old and bold' who had served in such places as China, Tibet, France and Palestine (in the Great War) and on the Frontier in many campaigns, and the young officers of the Sikh LI. When Air Commodore 'Bertie' Drew started to talk about his time in China, or gave one of his celebrated pep talks on the M & Rs, everybody listened, but especially the newer members.

It was always exciting to take the Underground to Central London and see a gradual increase in the numbers of Sikh Pioneer and LI ties as the final destination grew closer! Lt Col J F 'Podge' Peart took over as Hon Sec of the Association in 1965 from 'Pumpus' Pearse.

In 1966, three pieces of Sikh Pioneer silver were presented to what was hoped to be their final homes. The magnificent Dragon Bowl, for some years the centre-piece of the 34th Royal Sikh Pioneers, was a memorial to that Battalion's service in China 1900–1901; and Maj C K Crookshank (son of Col A C W Crookshank who raised the 34th in 1887) and Air Commodore Drew were survivors of those times who were still with us. The Kelly Rose Bowl of the 23rd Sikh Pioneers, commemorating Col Kelly's epic march to relieve Chitral in 1895, and the Dragon Bowl, were presented to Gen Sir Frank Simpson, Chairman of the United Services Club. Finally the unique Pioneer Piquet Memorial, consisting of a silver model of a *sangar* on a stone taken from the actual *sangar* itself, and commemorating the action of the 3/34th Sikh Pioneers on 21st December 1919 in repulsing attack after attack by large numbers of Mahsud tribesmen, was presented to the National Army Museum by Lt L N Loder, who won his MC that day, and who was the only survivor of that action still with us.

The death was announced at the 1967 Reunion of Col F M Bailey (32 SP) CB, who had a most distinguished career from

Tibet 1903–4 onward in the Political Dept. He was Political Agent in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and S.E. Asia and in 1917/18 with Mesopotamian Force and then in Persia. Later he became Adviser in Kashmir and several Indian States. His explorations in China, the Himalayas and the Brahmaputra Valley brought him international fame.

Capt Douglas Rees (34 RSP) took over as Hon Sec in 1968 from John Peart due to the latter's ill-health; and at the 1969 Reunion he had to report, amongst others, the death of Air Commodore Drew in January of that year. In a special Newsletter in Feb. 1970 he had to report the death of Maj C K Crookshank, who served with 'Bertie' Drew in the 34th in China for the Boxer Rising in 1901. Also in 1970 Capt John Hookway was co-opted to give a Sikh LI report in the annual Newsletter.

At the 1972 Reunion, a Mini-Reunion dinner was held at the Senior, but the luncheon was held at the the Naval & Military Club (*In and Out*), with Gen Savory in the chair. Gen Sir Frank and Lady Messervy were the principal guests, and the chairman welcomed Maj 'Bandy' Ewert (from New Zealand) who had flown specially from Copenhagen to be present. John Peart (23 SP) died in January 1972, as did Lt L N Loder in March that year. John Hookway commented in the 1972 Newsletter that there seemed to be a connection between the Regiment and the Somerset Army Cadet Force. At one time Gen Savory was County Commandant, John Peart was an Area Commander, and was to be followed in that post by the same John Hookway. John Peart had a particular fascination for the teenage cadets, with his rather eccentric ways: I really believe that he saw them as little Mazhbis... or perhaps there was a common way of leading them.

Due to falling numbers and the increasing costs of staying in London overnight to attend the dinner, it was ended in 1973, and from then on only the Reunion luncheon took place. The 1974 Reunion luncheon was held at the *In and Out*; Gen Savory was in

the chair and 30 members were present. Douglas Rees expressed his desire to give up the Hon Secretaryship, and Gen Savory thanked him for all the work that he had done. Capt J D Hookway was then introduced as the new Hon Sec from 5th October 1974, the first one from the Sikh LI.

The 1975 Spring Newsletter was memorable for the very full report by Brig and Mrs Lyn Goadby on their visit to the Regimental Centre at Meerut in January 1975, and this led directly to a major change in the contacts between the Regiment in India and the Association. Lyn had gone to India primarily for the 200th Anniversary of the Rajputana Rifles, to which he was posted on the disbandment of the Sikh Pioneers. Going on to our Regimental Centre at Meerut, they were welcomed by the Commandant, Col Victor Masilamani. Lyn took the opportunity of having a good look at the Regimental silver and trophies, and saw many old friends, including the Lama's seal, the Mosque of Omar and various pictures. He suggested that there must be many Sikh Pioneer Mess trophies and copies of McMunn's *History of the Sikh Pioneers* with former officers now in the UK, and efforts were soon made to try to send back any such items which could be spared. It may be coincidence, but from about that time the Hon Sec started to receive much more in the way of information, letters etc. from India, and I am happy to say that this has continued to the present day.

In the Newsletter the Hon Sec made the first of many pleas to ex-Sikh LI officers to put pen to paper and note down their recollections of their service with the Regiment. (Would that this had been followed-up more energetically at the time: this Regimental History would have been able to record many more people and their deeds.) He also reported the death of the Colonel of the Regiment, Lt Gen P S Bhagat, VC, to whom Gen Savory paid a very warm tribute.

The 1975 Reunion was held at the *In and Out*, with Gen Savory in the chair: guests included the Deputy High Commissioner for

India, K Natwar Singh and his wife, and the Assistant Military Adviser, Col V Badhwar and Mrs Badhwar. There were 43 members and guests at the Reunion, rather more than usual and, after the luncheon, there was a hurried exodus to the National Army Museum, where a unique ceremony was held. This was the presentation of the magnificent War Memorial Screen, in the form of a triptych of three very heavy, metal panels and, in the words of an irreverent bystander, weighing a b..... ton! Gen Savory spoke first, as under:

The Sikh Pioneers and Sikh Light Infantry

The Sikh Pioneers were raised in 1857. Their men were all Sikhs of the Mazhbi and Ramdasia classes; some had served in the disbanded army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Lion of the Punjab. They were formed into Pioneers and were trained, not only as pioneers but also as infantry. In view of the rugged and roadless country over which the Indian Army of those days had to operate, pioneers were an indispensable part of any Field Force partly as roadmakers, and partly as a reserve of skilled and tough fighting men.

So great, in fact, was the demand for their services, that no expedition on the frontiers of India was carried out unless accompanied by a unit of Pioneers. It followed that they saw more active operations than the other arms of the service, and attracted the best type of adventurous officer. In short, they became a *corps d'élite*.

In the First World War, one of their battalions fought in France as Infantry in the Indian Corps which had arrived just in time to plug the gap through which the Germans were beginning to pour. The rest served in Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, East Africa and, of course, on the North-West Frontier of India, in their dual role.

After the war, in 1922, the Indian Army was reorganised and ten years later, in 1933, during one of those economic crises with which we are all too familiar, all the Regiments of Pioneers were disbanded. Perhaps they had outlived their usefulness in those days of railways and motor roads;

perhaps they had become too technical and too similar to the Sappers and Miners. No one quite knew. They took the blow with their customary stoicism, held a final parade, distributed their funds and trophies, transferred as many men as they could to other units and sent the rest home. India was deprived of some of its finest fighting material.

Nine years later, in 1941, these same Mazhbi and Ramdasias were recalled to arms. Some of the older men had served in the Pioneers; the majority were relations. This time they were infantry, not pioneers, but they all had the same background. After some initial hesitation, they were called The Sikh Light Infantry and were allowed to bear on their colours the battle-honours of their predecessors The Sikh Pioneers.

Gen Savory went on to refer particularly to the 34th Sikh Pioneers, who won the coveted title of *Royal Battalion* in France in the 1914–18 War. They, with their race's typical thrift, collected the copper driving bands of shells fired at them on three fronts, and sackloads of these were collected at the depot. After the war, they were melted down and eventually cast into the magnificent War Memorial Screen. On the disbandment in 1932, it was offered to HM King George V, and accepted by him as 'a personal souvenir'. It had remained in Royal ownership until today when, by the Queen's command, Gen Savory was pleased to present it to the Deputy High Commissioner for India, K Natwar Singh, for transmission to the Regiment whose forebears had made it.

The Deputy High Commissioner accepted the Screen in a brief and amusing reply, saying how proud he knew the Regiment would be to receive back such an historic and interesting trophy.

It was also reported at the meeting that Brig A K Chatterjee, VSM had been appointed Colonel of the Regiment. In 1976 an annual subscription, initially £2, was introduced to replace voluntary donations, and Capt H C T Routley joined the Committee as Hon Treasurer to deal with this.

At the 1976 Reunion, more trophies were sent back to the Regiment: Gen Savory reported that the War Memorial Screen was now safely in the new Regimental Centre at Fatehgarh, and then said that he had been able to buy the Kelly Rose Bowl at an auction at the Senior. Unfortunately we were not able to afford the Dragon Cup as well. Then Mr Boris Mollo, of the National Army Museum, presented the Pioneer Picquet to Brig Vohra, Military Adviser to the High Commission for India, to be sent on indefinite loan to the Regiment.

In 1977 a very interesting letter was received from the Regimental Centre, describing the move to Fatehgarh and the hectic round of works which had to be carried out to make it comfortable. Work had been started on the Quarter Guard, the MT park, the Messes and the Guest House. The band had also acquired a name for itself, and was anxious to get the score of *Amazing Grace*! There was also a letter from the 3rd Bn, referring to their formation, and to the original Quarter guard Flag made by Mrs 'Peter' Bowden. Finally, it was with regret that the death of Mrs Hunt ('Hunty' as she liked to be called) was announced. Gen Savory described her as a real 'daughter of the Regiment': her father, Col A C W Crookshank CB actually raised the 34th Sikh Pioneers and died of wounds whilst commanding them during the Black Mountain expedition on the North West Frontier in 1888. Her husband Capt C E Hunt (34 SP) was killed in France in the First World War and she was left with two sons to bring up. Her book, *A Rainbow of Memories*, expressed her noble qualities: a connoisseur of the arts, a linguist, an inveterate traveller and a lover of mountains. Capt Routley represented the Regiment at her Memorial Service, where *Fight the Good Fight* was sung — at her request — with great gusto!

In 1979 Brig Lyn Goadby reported on another visit to India with his wife Joan; they were able to visit the 2nd Bn at Meerut and there met the Raja of Faridkot, HH Colonel Sir Harinder Singh, KCSI. Then off along the Grand Trunk Road to Jullundur, to see 3 Sikh

LI. Finally to Fatehgarh, being met by the new Centre Commandant, Col Ajit Sisodia. At a Mess Night, Lyn had made a formal presentation of the trophies sent back from UK and in return was presented with a copper replica of the War Memorial Screen and a magnificent bronze replica of the 32nd piece depicting a Mazhbi as a Mounted Infantryman in Tibet 1904, with a *jawan* of the Sikh Light Infantry today leading the pony, as a gift for the Association. Lyn said that, for once, he was speechless! The Winter Newsletter had to report the death, from cancer, of Maj Bandy Ewert, in Sept 1978. He was aged 58, and 1 Sikh LI remembered him as a cheerful, tough, gallant and efficient officer and as a good companion. He won the Regiment's first decoration, (an MC) and was as popular with the jawans as with the officers.

In 1980 the Association and the Regiment mourned the death of Lt Gen Sir Reginald Savory, KCIE, CB, DSO, MC on 14th June at the age of 85. He had served in the 1914–18 War in Egypt, Gallipoli, Persia, Mesopotamia and Siberia, and in 1923 in Kurdistan. In 1930 he went to the North West Frontier, and later commanded 1st Bn the 11th Sikh Regiment before commanding 11th Indian Infantry Brigade in the Western Desert in 1940–41. He was appointed GOC Eritrea, moving to Burma in 1942 to lead the 23rd Indian Division. He was Director of Infantry from 1943 to 1946, and then Adjutant-General in India from 1946 to 1947, was promoted Lt Gen in 1947 and retired in the following year. He won the MC in 1915 at Gallipoli, the DSO in 1941, was made CB in 1944 and KCIE in 1947. Col Barlow-Wheeler, then the chairman of the Association wrote:

The bare bones of Reggie Savory's life and career make a sufficiently exciting story in themselves and mark him out as one of the outstanding officers of the Indian Army. We who had the privilege and pleasure of being able to call him a friend will think of his unfailing tenacity, determination, cheerful acceptance of odds and also of the humanity, wit and kindness that was not always obvious in the taut military

appearance. As one old friend put it: 'Not many inches perhaps — but every inch an officer and a gentleman'. Nothing was too much trouble. After his retirement he became a Magistrate and a Deputy Lieutenant for Somerset. The beautiful coloured windows of the Indian Army Room at Sandhurst, known as *Reggie Savory's windows*, were made possible only through his personal efforts in raising the money and getting the job done.

He was the first Colonel of the Sikh Light Infantry, a distinction very appropriate because, when he was Director of Infantry, he had much to do with the Regiments' progress, and re-naming as The Sikh Light Infantry. Through all the years that he was Colonel of the Regiment and President of the Association, he devoted all his zeal to helping wherever help was needed and he was personally instrumental in getting so much of the Sikh Pioneer Silver returned to the Regiment. Many people will regret the passing of Gen Savory. We of the Sikh Light Infantry mourn the loss of our Colonel and our friend.

Sadly, obituaries began to feature more in the Association's Newsletters: Maj John Crosthwaite and Maj Tara Singh, both formerly with the 2nd Bn, died in 1980.

1981 was memorable for the presentation of Colours to fifteen(!) battalions of the Sikh Light Infantry in a most impressive parade at the Centre at Fatehgarh. The Colours were presented by The President of India, Shri N Sanjiva Reddy, and the members of the Association who were able to attend were:

Brig Lyn Goadby, OBE, DL and Mrs Joan Goadby	32nd SP
Mrs 'Peter' Bowden	32nd SP and 3rd Bn
Lt Col John Maling, DSO, MC	1st Bn
Col Bill Carvalho	2nd and 1st Bns
Capt Charles McBride and Mrs Lee McBride	1st Bn
Capt Hector Routley	Regtl Centre and 1st Bn

Capt John Hookway
and Mrs Janet Hookway

2nd Bn

The senior Indian officers were Maj Gen and Mrs A K Chatterjee (Colonel of the Regiment) and Brig and Mrs D J Mudholkar (Centre Commandant).

The party from UK was welcomed at Delhi Airport and steered through customs, before going through Delhi traffic to catch the Assam Mail for Shikohabad. Here we met up with John Maling and a lunch was provided in the Ladies and Gents waiting rooms, courtesy of a Mess Party specially sent down from the Centre. On to Fatehgarh in a hair-raising mini-bus journey, and we gladly accepted drinks before a curry supper. The Big Day was a splendid affair: our ladies had been fitted out in saris of Regimental pattern, and very smart they looked. The colour of the uniforms of the troops on parade was quite stunning to those of us used only to jungle green or khaki drab. The drill and marching were superb, and we all felt very proud and a little emotional watching all this splendour. We were also honoured to be presented to the President of India.

On the following days were a wide variety of social functions, of increasing peril to life and limb. The Officers' Mess Dinner was much as it used to be in our days, the VCOs' Mess Night was as lively as ever, with officers being 'cornered' by their old battalions and invited to prove their capacities! Very wearing, but not as wearing as the *Bara Khana*, which involved taking a drink (rum and water) with each of the fifteen battalions and the Centre that took part in the parade. I am glad to report that we stood up well to this ordeal! It was an unforgettable experience, and one which those who were able to attend will treasure.

In 1983 we had to report the death of Capt Douglas Rees, 34 RSP, aged 83. Douglas had been Hon Sec for several years and, as such, was a fount of knowledge about the Sikh Pioneers; and had

written a detailed diary of his service just after the First World War. His wise advice was to be sorely missed.

A party from the Association was able to visit the Regimental Centre for the Biennial Conference in February 1984, namely Brig and Mrs Goadby (32 SP), Mrs Bowden (32 SP and 3 SLI), Mrs Crosthwaite (2 SLI), Mrs Sutton-Pratt (rep 23 SP) and husband, Capt Rice (2 SLI) and son, Capt Routley (1 SLI and RC) and Capt Walters (2 SLI). On the way to the Centre they were able to visit Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. An Attestation Parade for recruits was held, with the oath being administered on the Granth Sahib. There were receptions and social events, and as before the whole party were made to feel most welcome, and that they really were a part of the Regimental family.

In 1985 we had to record the death of Brig Lyn Goadby, OBE, DL, who had been a moving force in setting up those close contacts with the Regiment in India which have lasted to this day. His obit in the local paper noted that 'during his annual leaves he undertook the rewriting of military routes in Gilgit and Chitral, which entailed walking hundreds of miles, sometimes at altitudes of 19,000 feet.' In a letter the Colonel of the Regiment, Maj Gen Chatterjee, described him as the 'father of the Regiment' and mourned his passing.

We first had news in 1986 that the Regiment was commissioning a History of the Regiment, and we were asked to help; in 1987 we learned of the project to construct a Boys' Hostel at the Centre for the sons of widows of the Regiment. Mrs Claire Spurgin, OBE, whose visit to India was covered in a previous Newsletter, died in 1986, as did Lt Col Jenney (11th Sikhs and 2nd Sikh LI). Mrs Sue Young, the daughter of Col Barlow-Wheeler, visited the Centre in 1986, and a report of the visit was included in the Newsletter. Unfortunately the Obits again began to mount in 1987, and we mourned the passing of Mrs Joan Goadby, Brig John Flewett, DSO and Bar (23rd SP), Lt Col John Ricketts MC, (his report on the

Centre at Lahore is published as *Farewell Lahore* in this History) and Maj Jock Worne (1 Sikh LI). In 1988 the Obits of Brig G L Lillies (23rd SP), Maj Whittome (SP) and Capt Wynes (32nd SP) were reported. Time marches relentlessly on, and these Obits were to increase until all the former officers of the Sikh Pioneers had passed on. Maj Williams (Bill Singh) died in 1989.

The Association and the Regiment in India were much saddened by the announcement, in 1989 of the death of the Hon Colonel of the Regiment, Col Sir Harrinder Singh Brar, Bans Bahadur, KCSI, Raja of Faridkot. His support was crucial in the early days of the Regiment; and in the difficult days following Partition in 1947 when the Centre was in Lahore his help and advice were invaluable.

The year 1990 marked the Golden Jubilee of the Regiment, and Maj Phil Watkin and Capts Bromley, Purdie and Walters represented the Association, as did Col Bill Carvalho from Australia. There was an interesting and varied programme of events, with Gen Chatterjee and the Centre Commandant Brig Tewari, to the fore. The new Colonel of the Regiment, Maj Gen Ved Malik AVSM, was unfortunately not able to be present due to service commitments. *Chatt*, as he was affectionately always known, retired from the Army and as Colonel of the Regiment from June 1990, after nearly 40 years in uniform.

In 1991 the real Golden Jubilee year was marked by the 1st Bn in Meerut. Present from New Zealand were Una Ewert and her two daughters Linda and Rebecca, and John Maling with his wife Frida and eldest daughter Sarah. From Australia, Bill Carvalho and his wife Glenys with sons Mark and Michael also attended. Reports were submitted to Association HQ re. this Southern Hemisphere invasion! In the same year a statuette of a Sikh LI *jawan*, first presented to the late Gen Savory by the Regiment and subsequently left to his nephew Maj A C S Savory, was handed over to the Hon Sec for despatch to India. Maj Savory was sure that that was where

it belonged. The venue for the Annual Reunions, which had since the beginning always been in London, was changed in 1992 to the Witney Lodge Motel, near Oxford. This obviated the difficulties of parking in Central London and also reduced the costs of the meals, but unfortunately the change did pose problems for a few members who found London more convenient. By now we were receiving regular copies of the excellent Regimental Journal, the *Khanda*, in sufficient numbers to permit distribution to our more active members. The 15th and 16th Bns of the Sikh LI were presented with Colours in February 1994, and Maj Watkin and his daughter Mrs Enwright, with Capt Walters, were there to represent the Association.

Lady Savory died in July 1994, and due to the shortness of the notice we were not able to be represented at her funeral: she had met Reggie Savory on the Trans-Siberian express in 1920 and, when his first wife died, they met up again and were married. Maj Bert Blezard (2 Sikh LI) also died in that year.

The First Draft of this Regimental History 1941–47 was circulated in 1995, and the (only) VJ Parade to be held was on the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War, 19th August 1995. The Association was represented by Majs Watkin and Gillespie, Capts Bromley, Hookway, Rice and Routley and Lt Dudley in the marching procession, and Maj Petherbridge and Capt Bennett in the stands. For such a small Association we possibly had the highest percentage turnout of members of any of those present. It was a marvellous affair, held on a very hot summer day and watched by huge crowds who cheered everyone to the echo. We all felt very proud to have been on the parade, and to have marched past HM the Queen, representing the Regiment.

Gen and Mrs Ved Malik visited the UK in June 1996 and we were able to arrange a mini-Reunion at the Royal Overseas League in London. It was a very warm and friendly gathering, and gave many the first opportunity of meeting the Colonel of the Regiment. Also

in that year we were saddened by the death of Maj Eric Lacey (2 Sikh LI): he had been a great rugby player after the war, and was a pillar of one of the most famous rugby clubs in England, Leicester.

Three members of the Association joined members of the Sikh Brigade Association for luncheon at the Army and Navy Club in that year, and we found much to talk about. Gen Chatterjee (Ret'd), the former Colonel of the Regiment, visited London in 1997, and had a meeting with the Hon Sec and John Dudley: it was nice to see him looking so well, probably because he keeps so busy!

There was an extra toast to be drunk at the 1997 Reunion: in addition to the usual toasts to Her Majesty the Queen and The Regiment, we were for the first time able to add *The Chief of Army Staff*, as Gen Ved Malik had been appointed Chief on 1st October 1997, exactly 56 years after the Regiment was raised as the M & R Sikh Regiment. The toast was drunk with a feeling of real pride, both for Gen Malik and for the Regiment in which he — and we — served. What an achievement! But we also had to report the deaths of two stalwart and loyal supporters of Reunions over a great number of years, Mrs Betty Rees (34 RSP) and Mrs 'Peter' Bowden (32 SP): in their own ways each contributed to the warm and friendly atmosphere of the Reunions and helped to keep us in touch with the Sikh Pioneer days. Members of the Association were present at both funerals to represent the Regiment.

The Reunions have always been fairly informal, but more so of recent years. There would be drinks before the meal, when old friends could meet and chat, and latterly perhaps exchange news of minor ailments. The meal used to be taken on long tables, with a top table for the more senior, but at the Witney Lodge round tables of eight became the norm. This encouraged conversation during the meal, and helped those who had become slightly hard of hearing. The Chairman has, for some time, been appointed only at the Reunion because it had been noticed that previous permanent Chairmen had died off quite quickly afterwards, perhaps because of

the excitement; and appointing another permanently seemed to be giving a hostage to fortune. The Chairman welcomes guests and members, makes some appropriate remarks about visits made or reminisces about old times, before calling for the toasts and then handing over to the Hon Sec. The latter starts by reading out a list of 'wishes to be remembered', which unfortunately seems to be getting longer as we all get older. Then there are messages from overseas, always one from Lt Col John Maling and the Ewert family in New Zealand, and also from Col Bill Carvalho in Australia, followed by the Message from the Colonel of the Regiment, which keeps us up-to-date with the achievements of the Regiment and forthcoming events. He ends with remarks about other items such as attendance at the Reunion, and often displays items from the Centre, or shows a video received from India. Finally, the Hon Treasurer is invited to give his report on the finances of the Association. Hector Routley has kept these in good order for a large number of years, to the extent of being able to fund one bottle of wine per couple attending; and his past efforts were always greeted with acclaim. The luncheon ends with animated conversation and hopes to meet again next year.

Some years ago it was decided to establish Associate Membership, and we were pleased to welcome Maj Jim Baldwin (9 Jats), who had been Training Coy Commander at the Jungle Warfare School at Saharanpur in charge of Sikh LI troops. Also Lt Col MacFetridge (Mtn Arty) and Lt Seaber (Bihar) who regularly join our gatherings.

And what of the future? Time is inexorably gnawing away at our membership, as it is with all Ex-Indian Army Associations like ours. The umbrella is the Indian Army Association, which covers all regimental associations. It seems certain that, at some stage, individual Associations will have to disband or merge into the larger Indian Army, as opposed to Regimental Associations.

And after that...? Rather like the Cheshire Cat in *Alice's*

Adventures in Wonderland, we will all vanish quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest had gone.

Epilogue

by Lt Col E W Carvalho (Retd)

Capt J D 'Hukm' Hookway was the Adjutant of the 2nd Bn the Sikh Light Infantry at Shaibah, Iraq, when on 12th October 1946 at the age of nineteen, I reported to him with a draft of reinforcements from the Regimental Centre Lahore. It was beyond imagination that, over half a century later I would be honoured with an invitation to write an Epilogue to his fascinating account of the birth and early formative years of the Regiment.

A fast rewind of history takes one back to the year 1947! On 20th February it was announced in London that Indian Independence would be granted by June 1948. Within a month of the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten's arrival at Delhi on 22nd March, the transference of power to the two new Dominions was set for 15th August 1947. The certainty of Independence was in stark contrast to speculations on the future of Regiments re-raised or raised during the war, ours being one of them.

Emergency-Commissioned British Officers commenced repatriation to the United Kingdom for demobilisation. Whilst anxious to return, many were sad at the thought of parting. This was particularly so for the older British Regular Commissioned Officers who had given the best part of their lives to the Indian Army. It was a season of parting and farewells. Sound foundations, discipline and mutual regard were manifested in the orderly and friendly atmosphere in which handing and taking-over proceeded, ending in a clean break.

Immediate concerns for the future of the Regiment were quickly

dispelled. Of the eight Infantry units re-raised or raised during the period 1941–1945, the Sikh Light Infantry and the Bihar, Assam and Mahar regiments were earmarked for retention on the permanent establishment, while the Ajmere and Chamar Regiments, together with the Coorg and Lingayat Bn, were disbanded.

The Regimental Centre was still at Lahore on 15th August and moved into lines vacated by the 14th Punjab Regimental Centre at Ferozepore Cantonment on 27th September. During this period they evacuated a considerable number of Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikh families belonging to serving and ex-service personnel of the Sikh L I and the late Sikh Pioneers that were stranded in West Pakistan. HH The Raja of Faridkot, the Hon'y Colonel of the Regiment, graciously helped resettle many of these displaced people in his State. Whilst in the process of settling-in, the Sutlej broke its banks submerging most of Ferozepore resulting in the evacuation of personnel and stores to Faridkot. As ever, HH The Raja of Faridkot's Largesse was never in question.

The Centre moved to Meerut in 1951, and for the next twelve years was amalgamated with the Punjab Regimental Centre (ex 2nd Punjab Regiment) and was known as The Punjab and Sikh Light Infantry Regimental Centre. In 1963 it reverted to its original status with lines of its own and after thirteen years made a final move in 1976 to Fatehgarh where it was established in its present location by Col G V E Massilamani, AVSM. The Colours Presentation and First Reunion were held there in 1981 during the command of Brig D J Mudholkar.

To revert to the Bns, all three of which were far away from the Punjab on 15th August 1947:

- The 1st Bn was stationed at Poona. Lt Col E BC Wall handed over to Lt Col Gurkupal Singh (ex 8th Punjab Regt) on 18th October.
- The 2nd Bn having returned from Iraq a few days earlier on 10th August was at Dhond (near Poona). Lt Col J H Seagrim handed

Epilogue

over to Lt Col Balwant Singh (ex 14th Punjab Regt) on 29th September.

- The 3rd Bn had arrived in Madras on 31st July from Wana. Lt Col J V E Paterson later handed over to Lt Col Gurkipal Singh on 31st December after the latter's short stint with the 1st Bn.

Within weeks the 1st Bn moved north to Jullunder, and early in Jan 1948 was deployed and engaged in fighting in the Jammu and Kashmir theatre. The 2nd Bn formed part of a force sent to quell disturbances in Junagadh State while the 3rd Bn was later involved in the Hyderabad Police Action during September 1948.

Any lingering doubt as to the future of the Regiment was finally put to rest with the raising of the 4th Bn at Ferozepore on 12th July 1948. After a spell of fourteen years, further expansion commenced with six Bns being raised between March 1962 and January 1967, another three Bns together with the affiliation of a Territorial Army Bn between June and July 1979 and a further three Bns between July 1980 and June 1987. This brought the Regiment to a total strength of sixteen active Bns and a Territorial Bn. It is an achievement that speaks for itself, and the result of dedication, commitment, sacrifice and pride, inspired by the history of their forebears in the Sikh Pioneers.

They have acquitted themselves with distinction in wars on the sub-continent and with the United Nations Emergency Force in Gaza during the Arab Israeli Six-Day War in June 1967. I consider myself fortunate to have been in command of the 1st Bn during this mission. The Regiment later fielded Bns for another UN operation in Sri Lanka. Over the years they have received many decorations and awards for gallantry and distinguished service, adding four Battle and five Theatre Honours to the earlier list.

The jawans continue to be the finest one could hope to serve with and the Regiment is proud now to have quite a few second-generation personnel in the ranks and among the officers. Of

the post-war officers commissioned into the Regiment, as opposed to those drafted in, the first to be promoted to the rank of Brigadier was A K Chatterjee in 1975 who, shortly after, on the untimely demise of Lt Gen P S Bhagat, PVSM, VC, assumed the role of Colonel of the Regiment. He was also the first to achieve General Officer rank in 1981 eventually retiring in 1990 as a Lt Gen and Army Commander after a very distinguished career.

Over the years, the Regiment has been very well represented in the spectrum of Command and Staff appointments, ranging from Sub-Area, Brigade, Area, Division, Corps, and Army Commanders, as well as Military Secretary Army HQ, Vice Chief of the Army Staff and presently Chief of the Army Staff. Equally, in the instructional field they have also been well represented, with appointments from the Commandant of the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, to instructors at various levels in the Indian Military Academy, the National Defence Academy and other Colleges and Schools of instruction.

The recent promotion and appointment of Gen V P Malik, PVSM, AVSM, ADC, The Colonel of the Regiment as Chief of The Army Staff on 1st October 1997 exactly 56 years to the date of the raising on 1st October 1941, is an event of tremendous significance and pride for all members of the Regiment, past and present.

By all accounts, the Sikh Light Infantry lives up to the Regimental motto chosen in April 1950 at the Bn Commanders Conference at Ferozepore, a rough translation meaning 'Prosperity in peace and victory in war' or, in its original form:

Deg Teg Fateh.

This history, recording as it does the Regiment's beginnings and now touching on its journey to the present will surely be a source of much interest, pride and satisfaction particularly to those who served in it during the period 1941–1947, and especially Lt Col J D Maling, DSO, MC, one of the three Regular officers present on the

Epilogue

day of raising. Witnessing the high standard of turn-out and drill displayed by the Ceremonial Guard of Honour at Meerut in 1991 during the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the 1st Bn, 45 years after he had relinquished command, the pride on his face and the tears in his eyes said it all.

Appendix A

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

The Indian Army Lists plot the growth of the Regiment by listing the officers posted to it, and very interesting reading they make. They show the very small beginnings, and the eventual size of the Regiment, but not the casualties suffered except by comparison of each successive list.

It should be pointed out that these Indian Army Lists were obviously drawn up some considerable time before they were printed and distributed. For example, the January 1942 List probably dates to late 1941.

January 1942

There were only five officers, one Subadar Major, two subadars and nine Jemadars, hardly sufficient for two companies.

THE MAZHBI AND RAMDASIA SIKH REGIMENT

1st Battalion

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs,
Raised at Jullundur Cantt, 1st October 1941

Service for promotion from	Name	Rev. date of seniority <i>Majors</i>	Remarks
1.10.18	Price, C H	1.10.36	12 F F R - Comdt
29.1.20	Pearse, E P F	29.1.38	2 Punjab R - 2ic

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Lieutenant

29.8.35	Maling, J D, MC	29.11.37	11 Sikh R - Adjt
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2nd Lieutenants

29.10.40	Ranjit Singh	29.10.40	EC
7.11.40	Gurdial Singh	7.11.40	EC - 17 Dogra R, ITF

Subadar-Major

8.2.10	Jiwan Singh	29.7.40	15 Punjab R, ITF
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Subadars

..	Mit Singh, IDSM		
..	Puran Singh		

Jemadars

..	Mukand Singh	15.9.41	15 Punjab R
..	Hazura Singh	15.9.41	15 Punjab R
..	Sahib Singh	15.9.41	15 Punjab R - Jem Adjt
..	Jogindar Singh	15.9.41	15 Punjab R - Jem QM
..	Harnam Singh	15.9.41	
..	Banta Singh	15.9.41	
..	Sundar Singh	15.9.41	15 Punjab R
..	Rattan Singh	15.9.41	15 Punjab R
..	Indar Singh	15.9.41	Head Clerk

April 1942

The number of officers had increased to fifteen, of whom only one (Lt Col Maling, MC) survives to this day. The Subadar Major Jiwan Singh was enrolled in 1910!!, and of the other VCOs, two were enrolled in 1913, two in 1916, one in 1922 and the other ten in 1940 or 1941. This graphically illustrates the age gap which was one of the major problems in setting up the new Regiment, i.e. lack of continuity.

THE MAZHBI AND RAMDASIA SIKH REGIMENT

1st Battalion

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs
Raised at Jullundur Cantt, 1st October 1941

Service for promotion from	Name	Rev. date of seniority	Remarks From
<i>Majors</i>			
1.10.18	Price, C H	1.10.36	12 F F R - Comdt
29.1.20	Pearse, E P F	29.1.38	2 Punjab R - 2ic
<i>Lieutenant</i>			
29.8.35	Maling, J D, MC	29.11.37	11 Sikh R - Adjt
<i>2nd Lieutenants</i>			
..	Toby, C R	..	EC
23.8.41	Young, K N	23.8.41	EC - 9 Jat R - QM
29.10.40	Ranjit Singh	29.10.40	EC - 15 Punjab R, ITF
7.11.40	Gurdial Singh	7.11.40	EC - 17 Dogra R, ITF
13.9.41	Warner, J W	13.9.41	EC
27.9.41	Draper, F W	27.9.41	EC
1.12.41	Gurdial Singh	1.12.41	EC
12.2.42	Ewert, D J	12.2.42	EC
12.2.42	Slater-Hunt, J G	12.2.42	EC
..	Morrison J I	..	EC
..	Maynard, P B	..	EC
..	Raj Bahadur Singh		EC
<i>Subadar-Major</i>			
8.2.10	Jiwan Singh	27.7.40	15 Punjab R, ITF
<i>Subadars</i>			
..	Mit Singh, IDSM	5.11.40	15 Punjab R, ITF
4.7.13	Puran Singh	25.10.40	17 Dogra R, ITF

Jemadars

Mukand Singh, Rattan Singh, Hazura Singh, Indar Singh I, Sahib Singh, Indar Singh II, Jogindar Singh, Hazara Singh, Harnam Singh, Bhag Singh, Banta Singh, Labh Singh, Sundar Singh

October 1943

By October 1943 there were three Battalions (1, 2 and 3) and two Garrison Battalions (25 and 26). The Indian Army Lists were still prepared by battalions at this stage, and it is noteworthy that almost all the VCOs were enrolled in the early 1940s, except those who were re-employed. This meant that the level of training and of experience was very low, and had laboriously to be built up.

THE MAZHBI AND RAMDASIA SIKH REGIMENT

1st Battalion

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs
Raised at Jullundur Cantt, 1st October 1941

Names	Ranks. Subst, WS and Ty <i>Major</i>	Remarks From:
Price, C H	Ty Lt Col <i>Lieutenants</i>	12 F F R - Comdt
Maling, J D, MC	WS Capt, Ty Maj	11 Sikh R
Mohinder Singh, MC	Ty Capt	11 Sikh R
<i>2nd Lieutenants</i>		
Burnett, A B	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Drewe, B S	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Williams, V C M	WS Lt,	Brit Ser Attd
Toby, C R	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Worne, J D	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Ross, J R	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Blois, D L	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Hett, J A		Brit Ser Attd, - QM

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Warner, J W		EC
Whitaker, H	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Ewert, D J	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC - Adj
Gurdip Singh		EC
Munshi Singh		EC

Subadar-Major

Jiwan Singh	Sardar Bahadur, OBI
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Jemadars

Jogindar Singh, Daulat Singh, Sucha Singh, Bara Singh, Indar Singh, Sohan Singh, Arjan Singh, Wariam Singh, Basant Singh, Mehanga Singh, Mohindar Singh, Ishar Singh, Poshaura Singh, Piara Singh, Gurdit Singh, Pritam Singh I, Bawa Singh, Pritam Singh II, Hazara Singh

2nd Battalion

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs
Raised at Peshawar Cantt, 1st May 1942

Names	Ranks Subst,	Remarks
	WS and Ty	From:
	<i>Majors</i>	
Ker, T M	Ty Lt Col	11 Sikh R - Comdt
Sangster, R A K		12 F F R - 2 ic

2nd Lieutenants

Rocyn-Jones, O	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd - Adj
Nisbet, H A	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Savage, E J		Brit Ser Attd
Johnson, A C	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Bleazard, H H	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Smith, S G	Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Young, K N	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC 9 Jat R
Crosthwaite, J B	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Sorrell, D I P	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Watkin, R P		EC
Raghbir Singh Brar	WS Lt	EC

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Tara Singh	WS Lt	EC
Nanda, R B		EC
Narindar Singh	WS Lt	EC
Amarjit Anand		EC
Hepworth, F		EC
Yates, F V		EC
Crook, R		EC
Pearson, F E		EC
Mastan Singh		EC
Bali, N D		EC - QM
Mohindar Singh		EC

Subadar-Major

Mall Singh	Hony Lt
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Jemadars

Hazura Singh, Gurbachan Singh, Harnam Singh, Bhag Singh, Sundar Singh, Kishan Singh, Charan Singh, Lakha Singh, Indar Singh I, Indar Singh, Hazara Singh, Mehnga Singh, Labh Singh, Bukha Singh, Waryam Singh, Chattar Singh, Hari Singh

3rd Battalion

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasias Sikhs
Raised at Sialkot, 15th August 1942

Names	Ranks Subst, WS and Ty.	Remarks From:
	<i>Major</i>	
Pearse, E P F	Ty Lt Col	2 Punjab R - Comdt
	<i>Lieutenants</i>	
Moore, H R Du Pre	WS Capt, Ty Maj	8 Punjab R - 2ic
Waring, M R J	Ty Capt	17 Dogra R - Adjt
	<i>2nd Lieutenants</i>	
Savage, E J		Brit Ser Attd
Day, R F	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Mortimer, J F	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC 17 Dogra R
Shaw, R	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC 17 Dogra R

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Petherbridge, P G	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC 17 Dogra R - QM
Ranjit Singh	WS Lt	EC
Draper, F W	WS Lt	EC
Fearnley, K G O	WS LT, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Slater Hunt, J G		EC
Maynard, P B	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Gurpartap Singh Sekhon		EC
Mann, K R	WS Lt	EC
Sarwate, K A		EC
Kuppaswamy, G		EC

Subadars

Puran Singh	Bahadur, OBI	Ag Subadar-Major 17 Dogra R, ITF
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Jemadars

Bhag Singh, Rulda Singh, Budha Singh, Buta Singh, Warriam Singh, Munsha Singh, Nagindar Singh, Thakur Singh, Gopal Singh, Gurdial Singh, Budh Singh, Wirna Singh, Raja Singh

25th Battalion

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs
Raised at Aurangabad, 1st July 1942

Names	Ranks. Subst, WS and Ty.	Remarks From:
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Major

le Patourel, E C, MC	Ag Lt Col	Comdt
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Lieutenants

Mitchell, C G		Brit Ser Attd
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2nd Lieutenants

Cookson, R W	WS Lt	Brit Ser attd
Durston, J J	Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Hopkins, C F	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Dilbagh Singh Sidhu	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC - 127 Ind Garr Coy
Raj Bahadur Singh Sirohi	Ag Capt	EC

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Ferguson, W C	Ag Capt	EC
Wright, J	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Atma Singh	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC - 87 Ind Garr Coy
Bhagwant Singh	WS Lt	EC

Jemadars

Kehar Singh	Ag Subadar-Major
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26th Battalion

Raised at Poona, 1st October 1942

Names	Ranks. Subst, WS and Ty. <i>Majors</i>	Remarks From
Fox, R du V R, MC	Ty Lt Col	Comdt
Guthrie, R		2ic
<i>Lieutenants</i>		
Sardar Mohindar Singh Bedi	Ag Capt	AIRO
<i>2nd Lieutenants</i>		
Gurdial Singh	Ty Capt	EC - Adjt
Kew, B E E	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd - QM
Ganesha Singh	WS Lt	EC

April 1946

This was the last List before many of the more senior and long-serving officers went home to the UK or wherever on demobilisation. It shows that most of the senior officers were transferred from other Regiments, although a few had served with the Sikh Pioneers before their disbanding. The middle-ranking officers, all 2nd-Lieutenants but with War Substantive ranks of Lt and often Acting Captain or Major, were largely British Service, Attached, but Emergency Commissioned Officers (ECs) began to appear towards the end of 1941. At this stage the Regiment had 99 King's

Commissioned officers and 186 Viceroy's Commissioned officers, a startling increase in the space of four years.

THE SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs

Names	Ranks. Subst, WS and Ty.	Remarks From
<i>Lieutenant Colonels</i>		
Price, C H		12 F F R
Le Patourel, E C, MC		9 Jat R
Pearse, E P F		2 Punjab R
<i>Majors</i>		
Mallinson, E H P	Ty Lt Col	17 Dogra R
<i>Captains</i>		
Jenney, G R F	WS Maj, Ty Lt Col	11 Sikh R
Rumbold, W A	Ty Maj	1 Punjab R
Maling, J D, DSO, MC	Ty Lt Col	11 Sikh R
Moore, H R Du Pre	Ty Maj	8 Punjab R
<i>Lieutenants</i>		
Mohinder Singh, MC	Ag Maj	11 Sikh R
Tripathi, K N	WS Capt, Ty Maj	
Sardar Mohinder Singh Bedi	WS Capt, Ty Maj	AIRO
Ross, J R	Ag Maj	Brit Ser Attd
<i>2nd Lieutenants</i>		
Burnett, A B	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Drewe, B S	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Williams, V C M	WS Lt, Ty Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Worne, J D	WS Lt, Ty Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Cookson, R W	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Nisbet, H A	WS Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Johnson, A C	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Kishan Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Durston, J J	Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Mortimer, J F	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Smith, S G	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Young, K N	WS Capt, Ag Maj	EC
Hopkins, C F	WS LT, Ty Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Petherbridge, P G	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Warner, J W	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Draper, F W	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Sorrel, D I P	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Whitaker, H	WS Lt, Ag Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Watkin, R P	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Dharam Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Fearnley, K G	WS Lt, Ag Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Burley, A B	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd.
Ewert, D J, MC	WS Capt, Ty Maj	EC
Slater-Hunt, J G	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Dilbagh Singh Sidhu	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Kishan Murari Sahai	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Maynard, P B	WS Capt, Ty Maj	EC
Raj Bahadur Singh Sirohi	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Krishan Parkash Kalsy	WS Lt	EC
Ferguson, W C	Ty Capt	EC
Talbot-Butt, P	WS Lt	EC
Atma Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Nasar, S	WS Lt	EC
Chuhar Singh Goraya		EC
Bhagwant Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Gillespie, D H	WS Lt	EC
Gurpartap Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Raghbir Singh Brar	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Munshi Singh	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Farrall, F E	WS Capt, Ag Maj	EC
Madan Mohan Lal Whig	WS Lt	EC
Tara Singh	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Raghbir Bahadur Nanda	WS Lt	EC

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Narinder Singh	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Yates, F V	WS Lt	Ec
Crook, R	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Pearson, F E	WS Lt	EC
Kushall Ram Mann	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Sarwate, K A	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Kuppuswamy, G N	WS Lt	EC
Mastan Singh	WS Lt	EC
Robson, H N	WS Lt	EC
Mohinder Singh	WS LT, Ty Capt	EC
Webster-Smith, B C E A	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Ata Mohammed, MC	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Heath, E E	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Shan Sundar Rai		EC
Brown, E H C	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Jones, J M	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Routley, H C T	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Callin, J P	WS Lt	EC
Tinto, J I	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Lacey, E C	WS Lt	EC
Autar Singh Anand	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Jones, E	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Albert Bhattacharjee	WS Lt	EC
Casselle, D R	WS Lt	EC
Leaney, J M	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Pannifer, W F	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Almy, R D	WS Lt	EC
Hookway, J D		EC
Walters, H		EC
Clarke, D J		EC
Mekenzie, T D		Brit Ser Attd
Maitland, G F		EC
Tate, H L		EC
Shivder Singh		EC

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Friend, J A		Brit Ser Attd
Cocks, A T	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Rice, J G		EC
Purdie, W D		EC
Randell, C H E		EC
Bennett, G P	WS Lt	EC
Leete, G B		Brit Ser Attd
McBride, C M		EC

Quartermasters

Major

Guthrie, R

Lieutenant

Blythe, W E G EC

Subadar-Majors

Mall Singh Hony Capt, Sardar

Bahadur, OBI

Sohan Singh Sardar Bahadur, OBI

Subadars

Bachan Singh, MC WS Subadar-Major

Puran Singh Sardar Bahadur, OBI

Natha Singh

Jemadars

Darbara Singh Sardar Bahadur, OBI

WS Subadar-Major

Faqir Singh WS Subadar-Major

There were also 179 Jemadars, many with the WS rank of Subadar.

October 1946

This was the last Indian Army List available, and shows the final intakes of young officers from Training Schools.

THE SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY

Class Composition: Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs

Names	Ranks. Subst, WS and Ty.	Remarks From
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Lieutenant Colonels

Price, C H
Morris, C W M
Pearse, E P F

Majors

Goodchild, S	Ty Lt Col	
Jenney, G R F	Ty Lt Col	

Captains

Wall, E B C	Ag Lt Col	
Ricketts, J M, MC	Ty Maj	
Quayle, H M D	Ty Lt Col	
Maling, J D, DSO, MC	Ty Maj	
Sultan Ali Shah	Ty Maj	
Moore, H R M		
du Pre, MC	Ty Maj	
Morris, R R	Ty Maj	
O'Flynn, G C	Ty Maj	
Mir Afzal	Ty Maj	
Mohinder Singh, MC	Ty Maj	

Lieutenants

Jafarali Khan	Ty Maj	
Man Singh	WS Capt, Ty Maj	
Tripathi, K N	WS Capt, Ty Maj	
Sher Mohindar Singh Bedi	WS Capt, Ty Maj	
Sehor Mohd.Khan	WS Capt, Ty Maj	
Ross, J R	Ty Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Burnett, A B	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Williams, V C M	WS Lt, Ty Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Cookson, R W	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Nisbet, H A	WS Capt	Brit Ser Attd

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Moreton, M H	WS Capt, Ty Maj	EC
Johnson, A C	WS Lt, Ag Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Kishan Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Young, K N	WS Capt, Ty Maj	EC
Warner, J W	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Draper, F W	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Whitaker, H	WS Lt, Ag Maj	Brit Ser Attd
Dilbagh Singh Sidhu	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Krishna Murari Sahai	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Raj Bahadur Singh Sirohi	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Kalsy, K P	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Atma Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Nasar, S	WS Lt	EC
Chuhar Sungh Goraya		EC
Bhagwant Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Gillespie, D R	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Kapadia, N J	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Garpartap Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Joginder Singh Dhillon	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Raghbir Singh Brar	WS Lt, Ag Maj	EC
Munshi Singh	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Tara Singh	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Amamit Anand	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Raghbir Bahadur Nanda	WS Lt	EC
Narinder Singh	WS Capt, Ty Maj	EC
Mann, K R	WS Capt, Ty Maj	EC
Sarwate, K A	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Kuppuswamy, G N	WS Lt	EC
Mastan Singh	WS Lt	EC
Mohindar Singh	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Ata Mohammed, MC	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Aitiwadekar, S T	WS Capt	EC
Shan Sundar Rai		EC
Jones, J M	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC

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Routley, H C T	WS Lt, TY Capt	EC
Callin, J P	WS Lt	EC
Autar Singh Anand	WS Lt, Ag Capt	EC
Albert Bhattacharjee	WS Lt	EC
Binney, J D	WS Lt, Ty Capt	Brit Ser Attd
Casselle, D R	WS Lt	EC
Pannifer, W F	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
Almy, R D	WS Lt	EC
Gurbachan Singh Intizar	WS Lt, Ty Capt	EC
Hookway, J D		EC
Walters, H	WS Lt	EC
Clarke, D J		EC
Cooper, D J A	WS Lt	EC
Mekenzie, T D		Brit Ser Attd
Fish, J L		Brit Ser attd
Maitland, G F	WS Lt	EC
Tate, H L	WS Lt	EC
Shivder Singh	WS Lt	EC
Friend, J A		Brit Ser Attd
Cocks, A T	WS Lt	Brit Ser attd
Rice, J G	WS Lt	EC
Purdies, W D	WS Lt	EC
Randell, C H E		EC
Leete, G B	WS Lt	Brit Ser Attd
McBride		EC
Hodge, K C		EC
Nur-ul-Haq		EC
Sham Singh Dhillon		EC
Beale, P O		Brit Ser Attd
Reynolds, F G		EC
Ralph, J		EC
Bromley, H J		Brit Ser Attd
Baker, J G		Brit Ser Attd
Grahm, L J		Brit Ser Attd

Officers of the M & R Sikh Regiment and Sikh Light Infantry

Midgley, P G	Brit Ser Attd
Jenkins, J E	Brit Ser Attd
Carvalho, E W	EC
Brooks, N L	EC
Skinner, S G	Brit Ser Attd.

Quartermasters

Major

Guthrie, R

Lieutenant

Blythe, W E G

Subadar-Majors

Mall Singh

Hony Capt, Sardar Bahadur, OBI

Sohan Singh

Hony Lt, Sardar Bahadur, OBI

Subadars

Bachan Singh, MC

WS Subadar-Major

Puran Singh

Sardar Bahadur, OBI

Darbara Singh

WS Subadar-Major

Mokand Singh

Bahadur, OBI

* * * * *

It is an exercise in nostalgia to read through these lists and to wonder, idly, what has happened to some of our colleagues and friends. Many dropped out shortly after the end of their service, and many more had received the Final Call. But their names are recorded here, and should not be forgotten.

Appendix B

Messages re. Japanese surrender

Message to all units in 99 Brigade: 11 Aug 1945

MESSAGE FORM

From:- 99 Ind Inf Bde

To:- 1 E Yorks 1 Sikh LI 1/3 GR 4 Fd Regt RA TG Fd Coy 414 Fd Pk Coy A Coy 6 Rajput 9 D Coy 9 F F RIF 4 Sqn 116 Regt RAC 28 Sqn RAF 2 V Ops 99 BG CAS(B) 99 LAD 99 Sigs 123 Wksps BIC.

02050 (.) SECRET (.) the following has been received from 9/4 cours (.) ref broadcast announcements JAPS virtual acceptance POTSDAM terms (.) unlikely that order to cease resistance will reach forward JAP TROOPS this area and be acted on for considerable period perhaps several weeks (.) in these circumstances our offensive effort will be in NO way relaxed for present (.) if we relax at all JAPS is still likely to take advantage and cause unnecessary risks (.) this must be explained to all tps (.)

John Maling comments: 'This signal received from 99 Bde HQ on 11 Aug 45, originating from 4 Corps HQ. The first real news of peace coming up.'

Message to all Japanese Military Forces: 16 Aug 1945

ALL JAPANESE MILITARY FORCES

YOUR COUNTRY HAS SURRENDERED.

1. YOUR SAFEST LINE OF ACTION IS TO SEND IN ENGLISH SPEAKING REPRESENTATIVES UNDER FLAGS OF TRUCE (WHITE FLAGS) TO ANY OF OUR FORWARD POSTS. YOU SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO SURRENDER IN SMALL PARTIES: ALL SURRENDERS WILL BE IN DAYLIGHT.

2. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THIS HAPPENS OFFENSIVE ACTION WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST YOU.

3. WHEN YOU SURRENDER, YOUR LIVES WILL BE QUITE SAFE.

16th August 1945. SENIOR COMMANDER.
BRITISH MILITARY FORCES.

John Maling comments: 'The day after VJ we were expected to air-drop them. I don't think we saw any surrenders till we got to Tenasserim in September.'

M & R

A Regimental History of the Sikh Light Infantry 1941–1947



EDITED BY
J D Hookway

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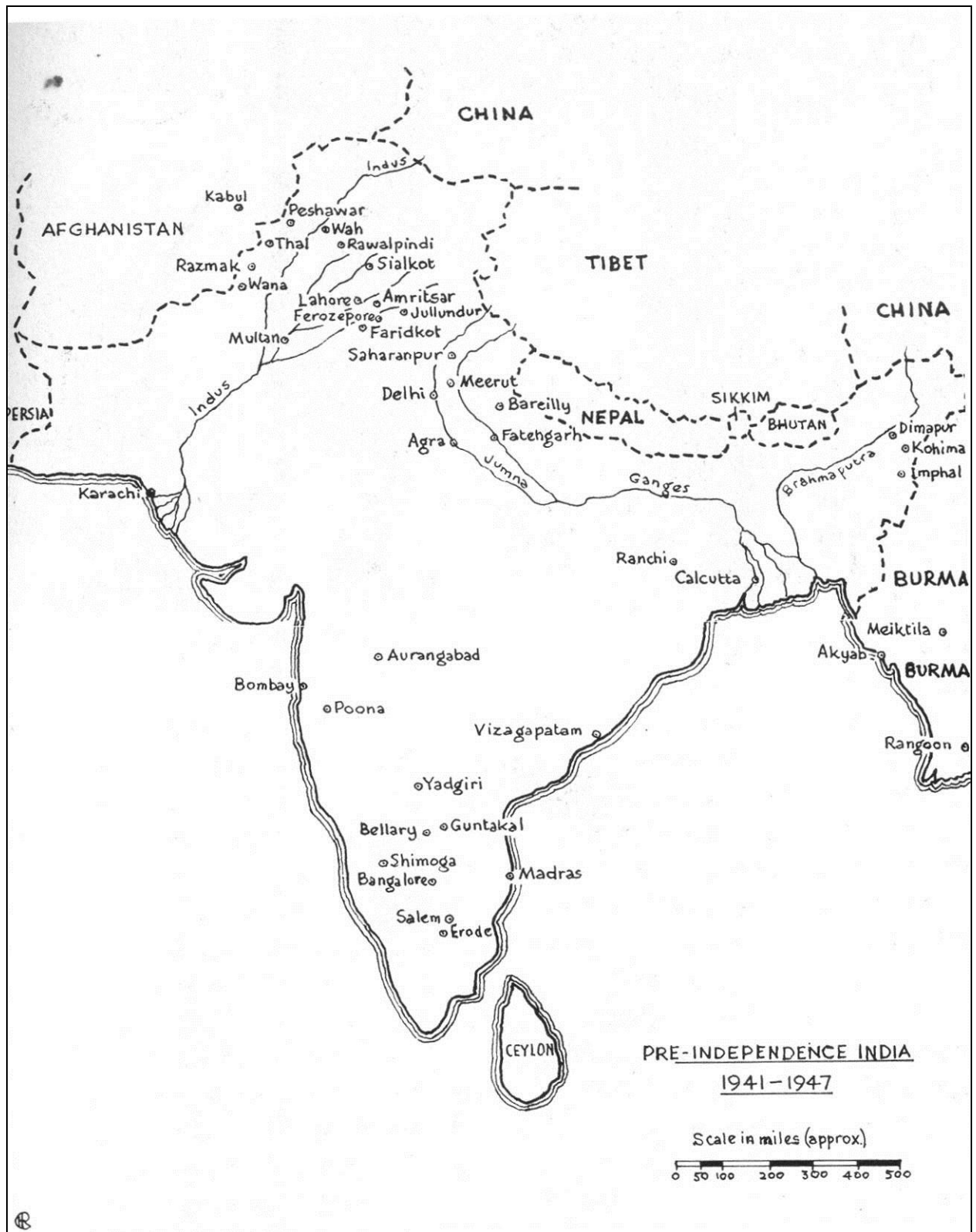
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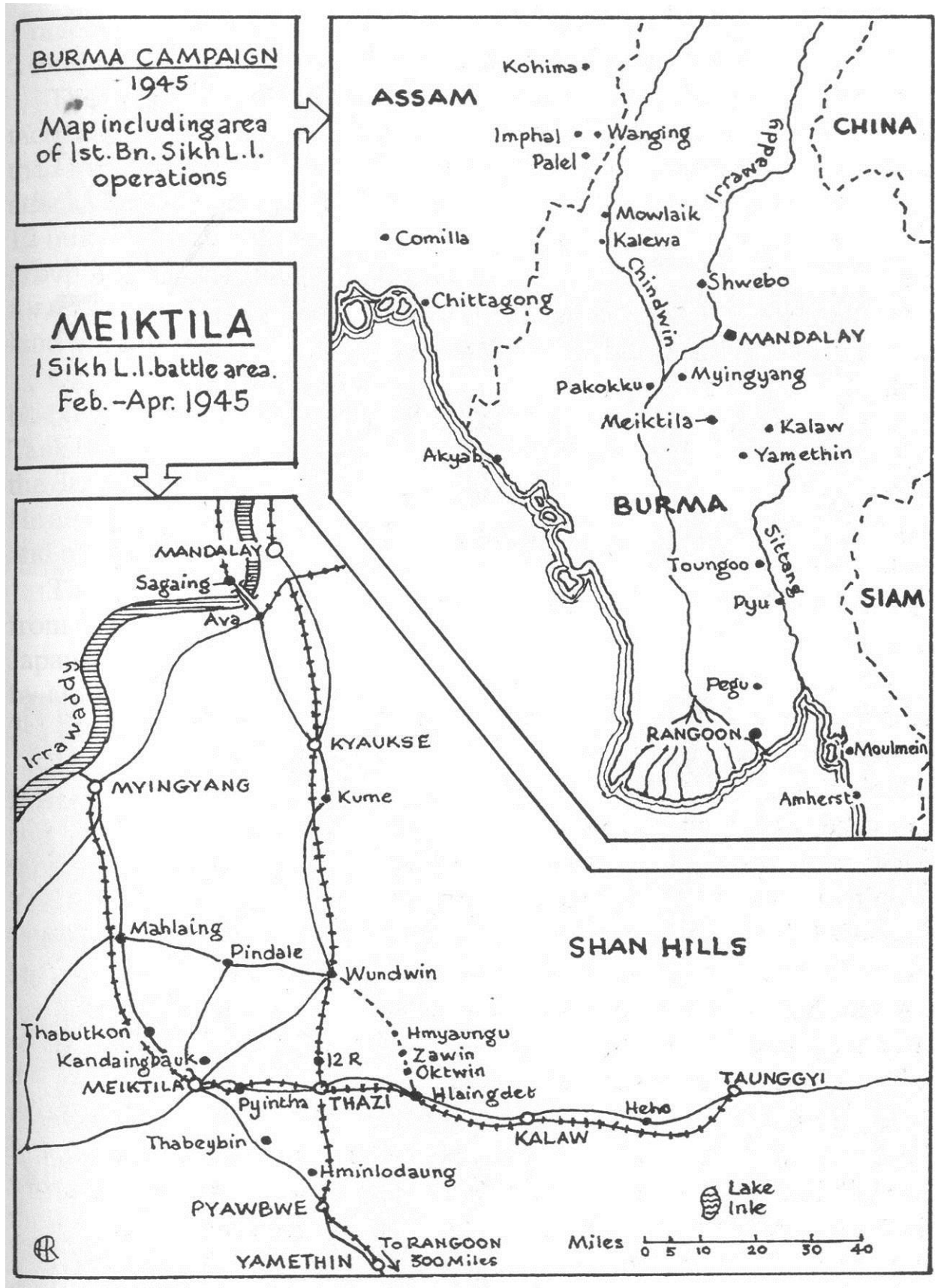
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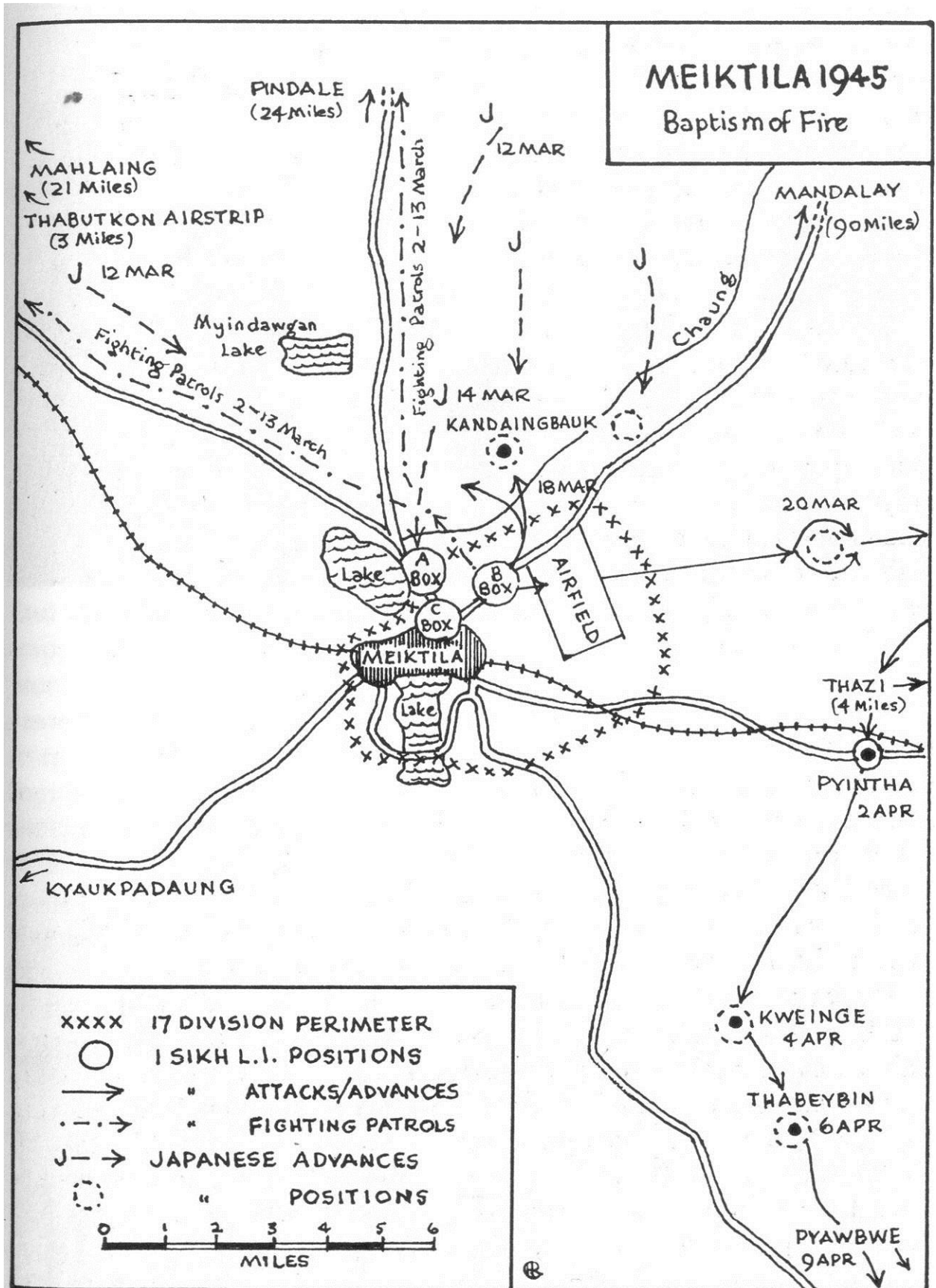
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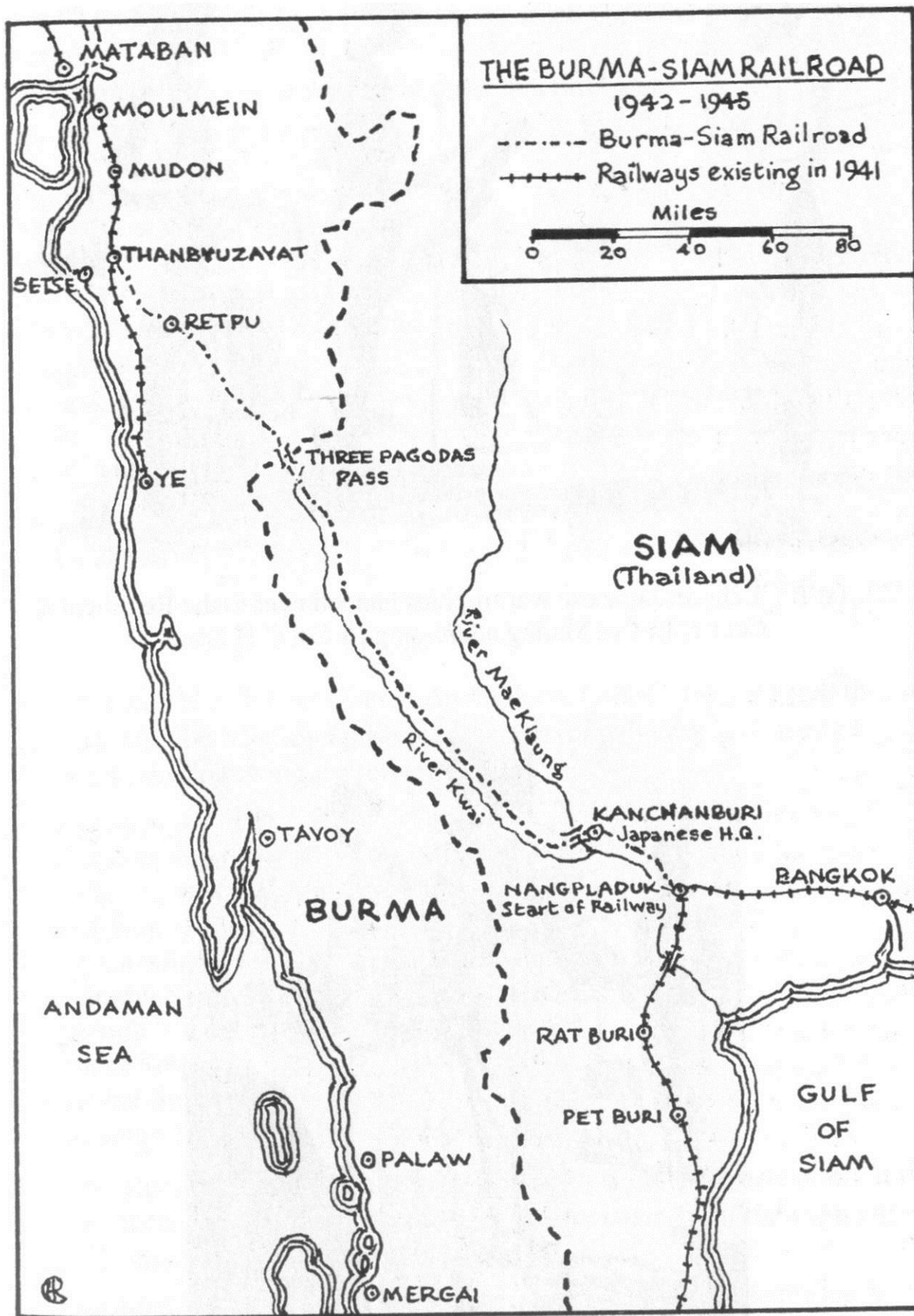
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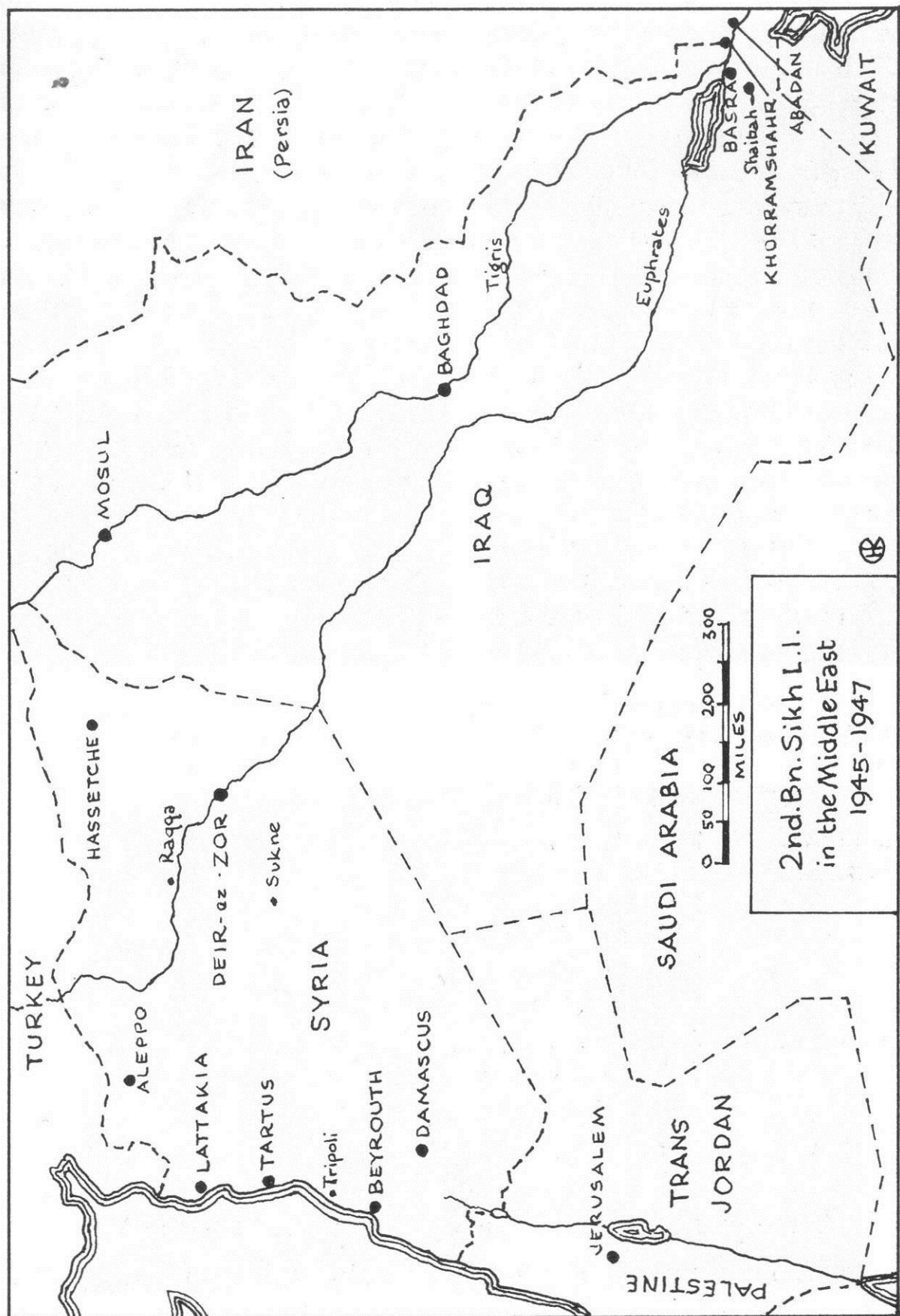
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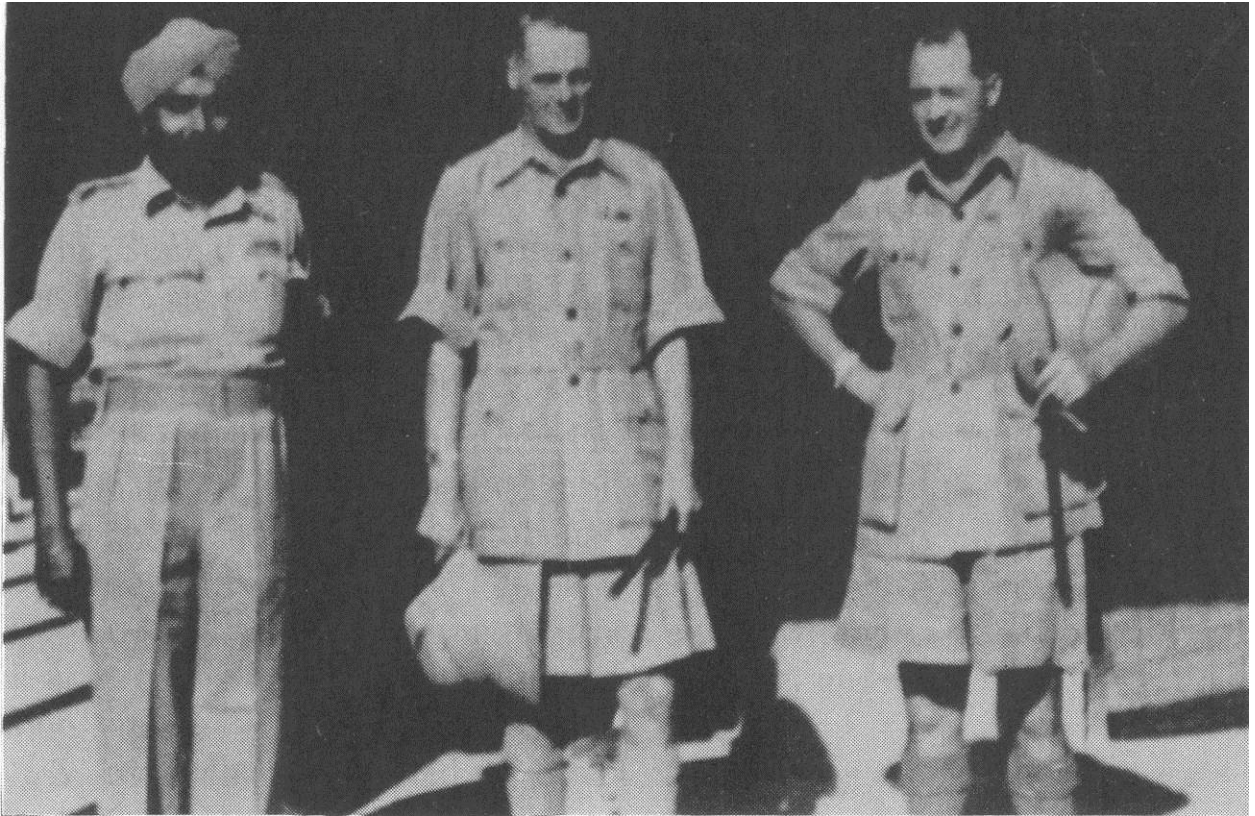




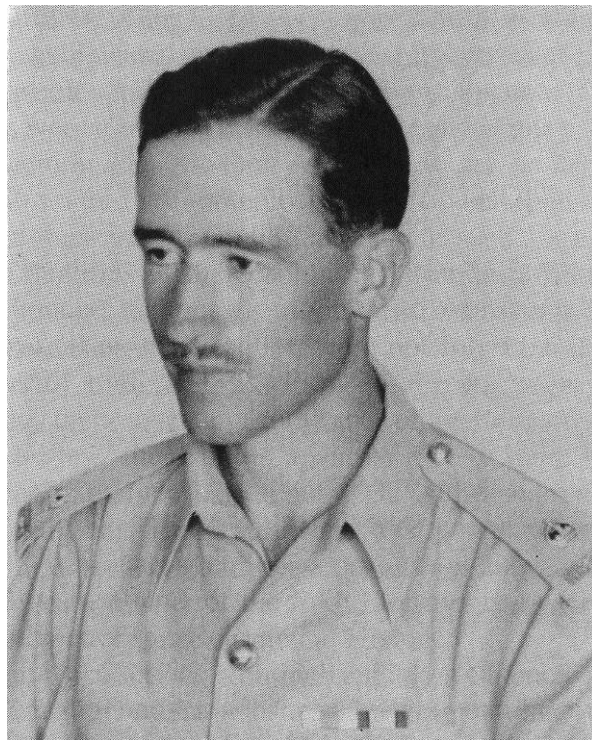




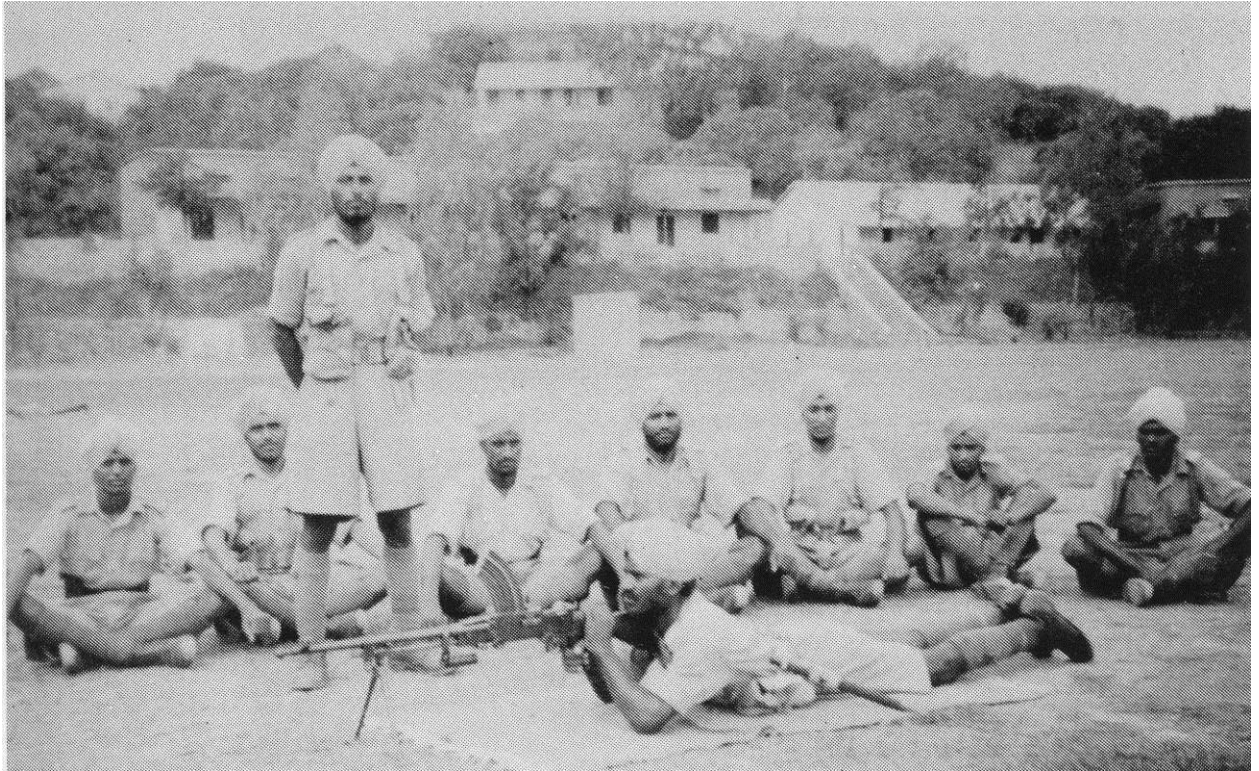




1st Bn Founding officers: Sub Maj Jiwan Singh,
Lt Col C H Price and Maj E P F Pearce



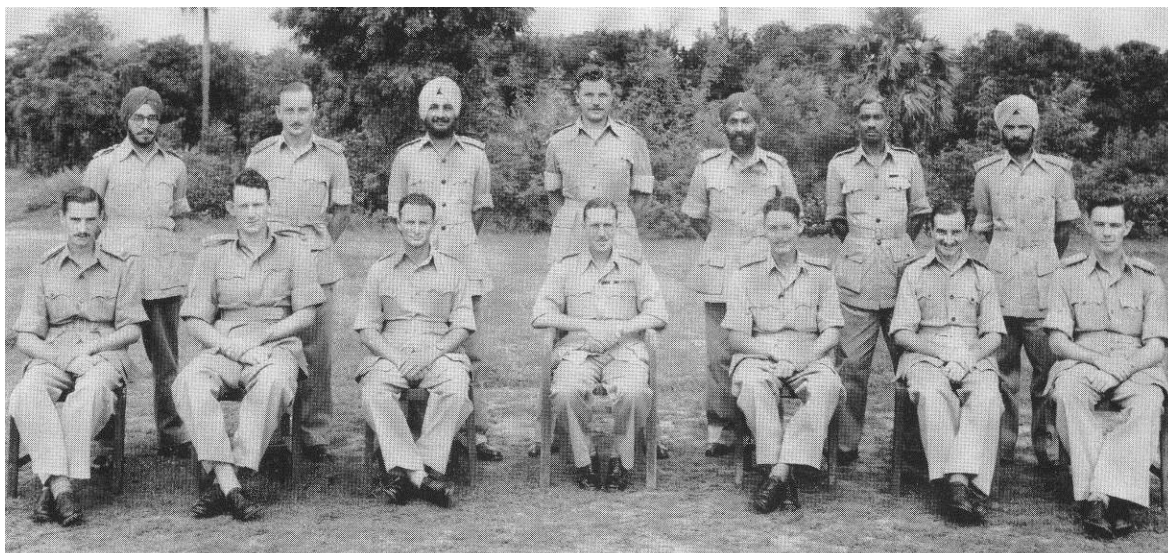
1st Bn Founding officer: Maj J D Maling, MC



Training: Vickers-Berthier gun cadre



Christmas group of officers, 1942
L to R: Ewart, Burnett, Ballentyne



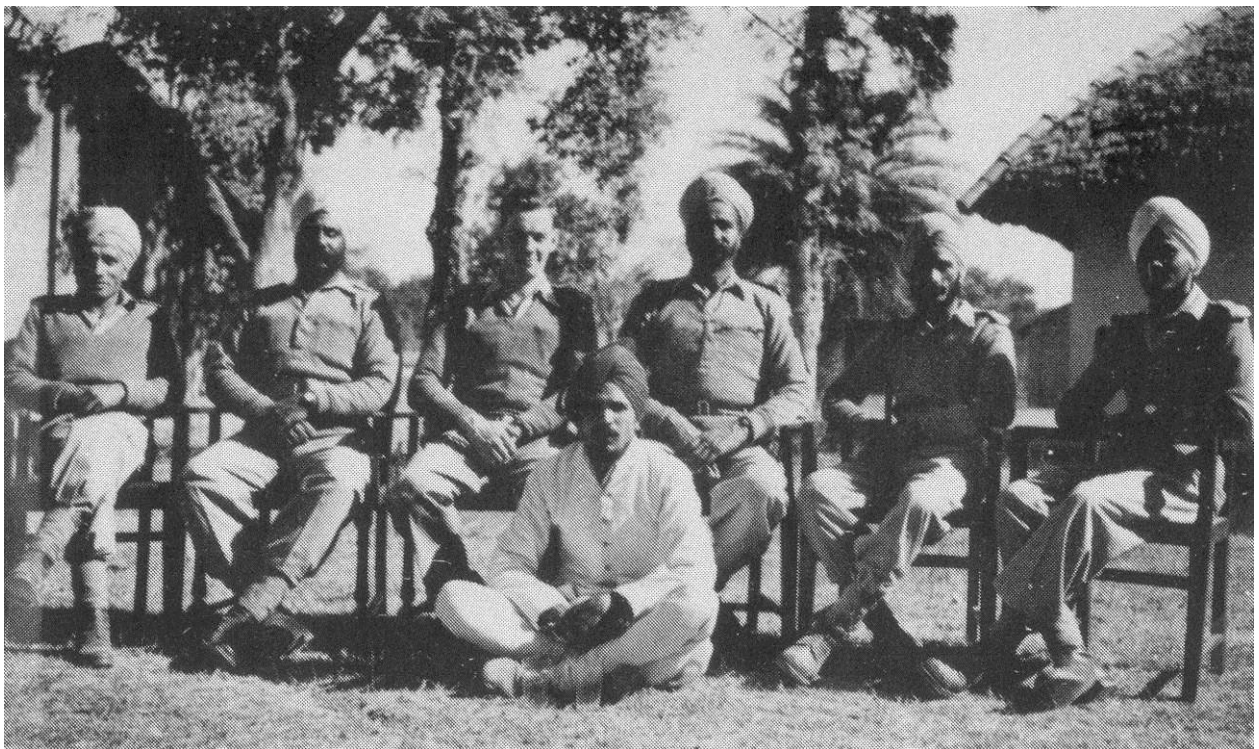
Officers of 2nd Bn at Madras, early 1945
Seated, L to R: Maj D I P Sorrel, Maj J P Crossthwaite,
Maj W Rumbold, Lt Col G R F Jenney, Maj R Crook,
Maj S G Smith, Capt R P Watkin
Standing L to R: Maj Narrinder Singh, Capt F E Pearson,
Maj Raghbir Singh Brar, Capt E C Lacey, Sub Maj Mall Singh OBI,
Medical Officer, Capt Mohinder Singh



25th Garrison Bn, Evacuation from Khorramshahr: wheeled carrier



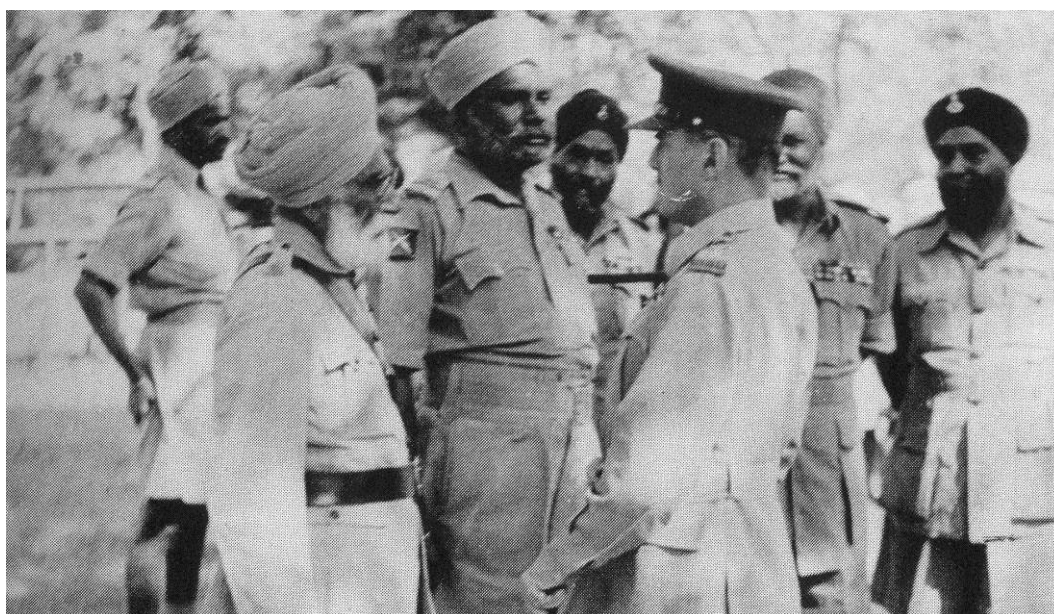
25th Garrison Bn, Evacuation from Khorramshahr: Jeep and lorry



Trg Bn, Bareilly: Capt R P Watkin, Coy VCOs and orderly



Hony Col Sir Harinder Singh, Raja of Faridkot



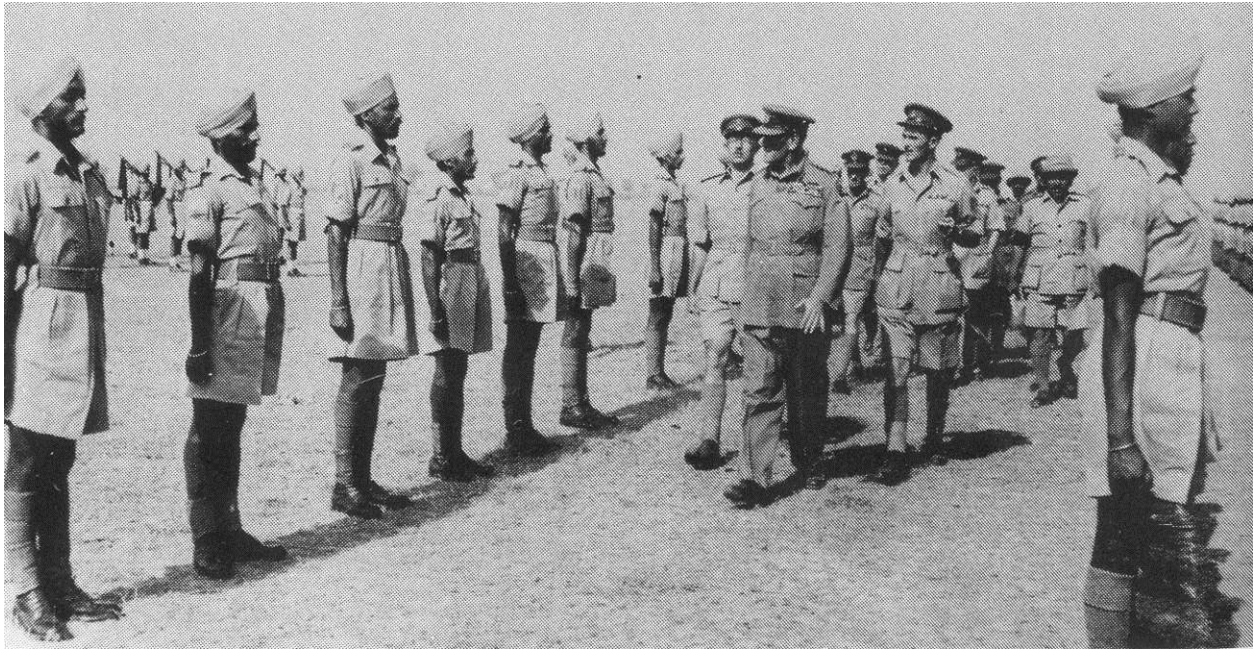
Regtl Centre Lahore: Lt Gen Sir Reginald Savory with pensioners



Regtl Centre Lahore: Officers at Sports Day
L to R: Rickets, Pearse (head), Price, Savory



Regtl Centre Lahore: COs' Conference, January 1946
L to R: Young, Atma Singh, Munshi Singh Brar, NK, Draper,
Gurpartap Singh, Blythe, Heath, Warner, Pannifer, NK, Dudley,
Webster-Smith, Brown, NK, NK, Naryana, Aitiwadekar, Leasey,
NK, Shirdev Singh, NK, Baij Nath



Regtl Centre Lahore May 1946: FM Auchinleck inspecting
Admin Coy with Capt Bennett (L) and Col Ricketts (R)



1st Bn, Burma: Jat Sikh signaller from Div Signals, att to Bn.
There were two, the only contact with Div HQ.



Bullock cart, as used for transport in Burma



1st Bn, Burma: Troops advancing under cover of smoke



1st Bn, Burma: Troops clearing an enemy position



18-1st Bn-Pyawbwe: Capt Kalsy (QM) and Sub Maj Bachan Singh



1st Bn, Pyawbwe: Jawans advancing using cover



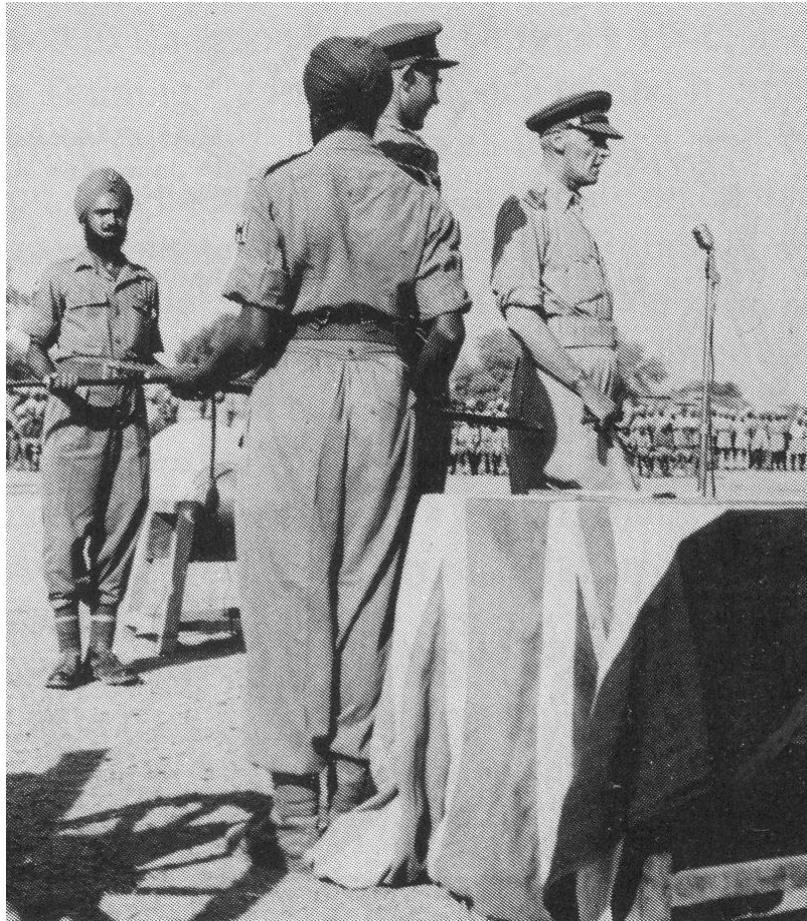
1st Bn, S Shan States: Mortar Pl setting-up mortars



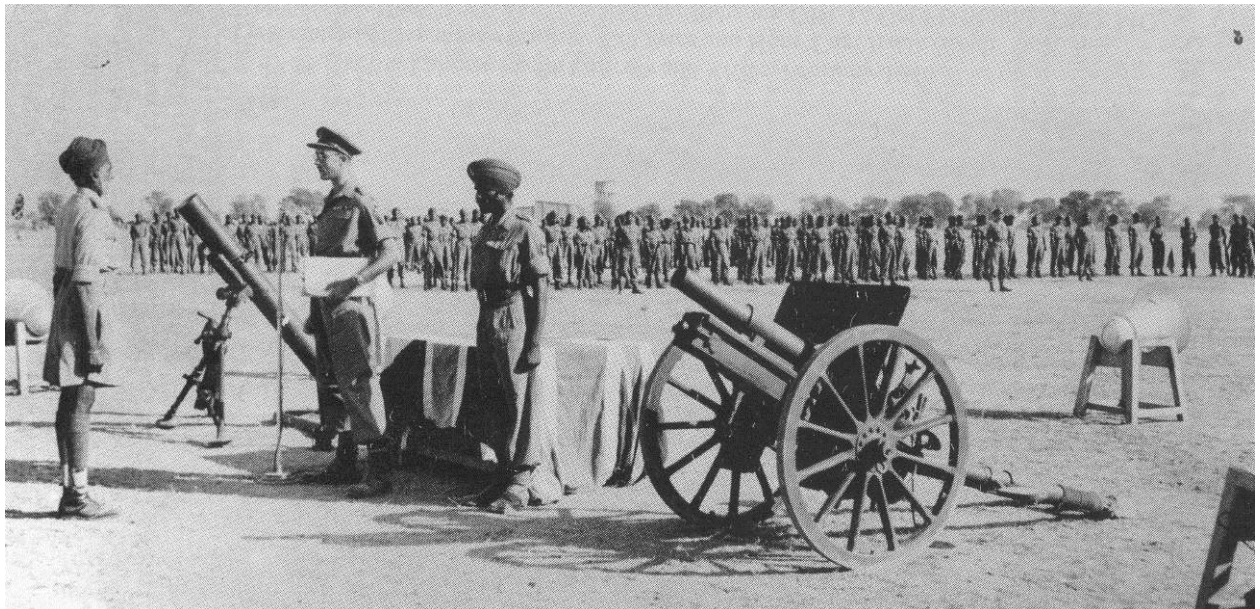
1st Bn, S Shan States: Overlooking Taunggyi, the capital



1st Bn, Lahore: Japanese war trophies being handed over to the Regimental Centre; Lt Col Maling addressing Lt Col C H Price



1st Bn, Lahore: Lt Col C H Price addressing 1st Bn



1st Bn, Lahore: Japanese field gun and heavy mortar
being handed over to the Regimental Centre



1st Bn, Lahore: Officers and VCOs, February 1946: presentation of Japanese swords to Col Price and Hony Capt Jiwan Singh

Front row: Maj KN Tripathi, Hon Capt Jiwan Singh, Sardar Bahadar, OBI, Lt Col J D Maling, DSO, MC, Lt Col C H Price, Sub Mohinder Singh, MC, Maj D J Ewert, MC and bar

Middle row: Capt A Battacharjee, Sub Hazara Singh, Capt Munshi Singh, Jem Mohan Singh, Capt Gurpurtap Singh, Jem Waryam Singh, Capt E Jones, Jem Kartar Singh, Sub Waryam Singh, Sub Pritam Singh

Rear row: Lt A T Cocks, Sub Gurdial Singh, Lt A P Bennett, Sub Pritam Singh, Lt C M McBride, Jem Nand Singh, Lt R D Almy, Jem Bhir Singh



2nd Bn, Deir-ez-Zor: Capt Clarke (QM) and Jem QM



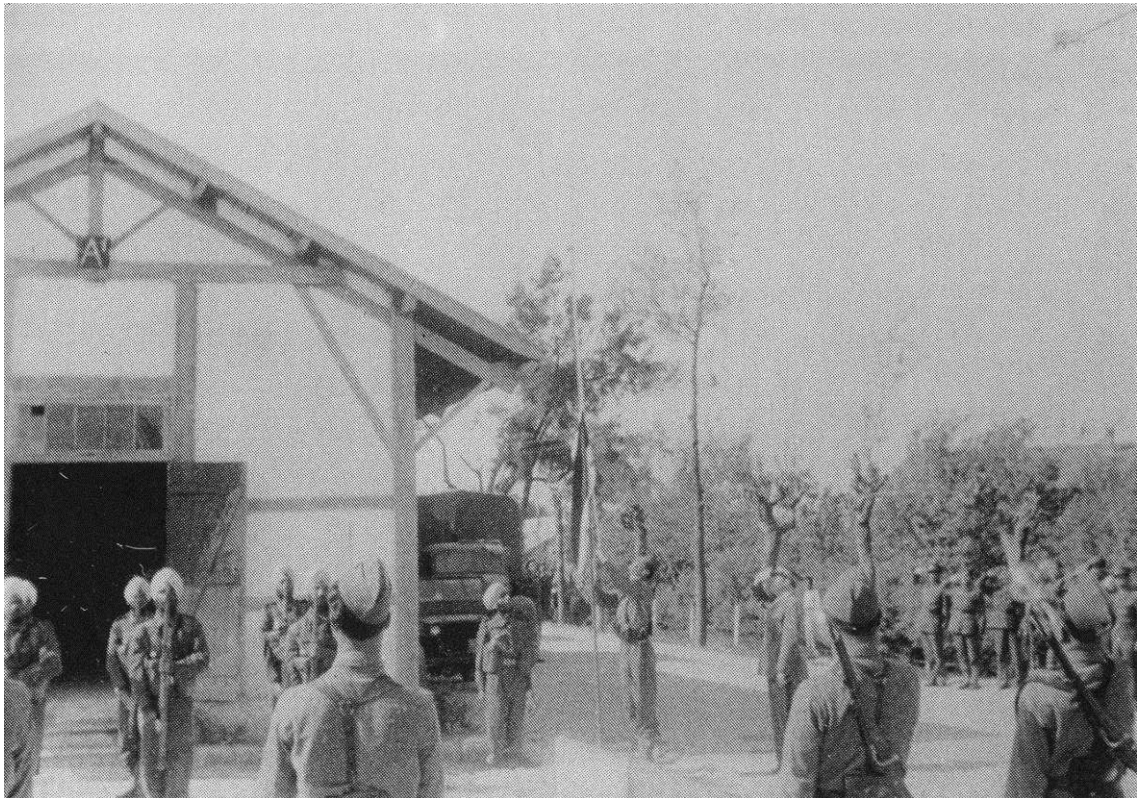
2nd Bn, Deir-ez-Zor: Capt Walters, tents in background



2nd Bn, Deir-ez-Zor: Maj Pearson, French officer, Capt Hookway, French officer, by Officers' Mess



2nd Bn, Lattakia: Handover to the Syrian Army;
the Union Jack by the Quarter Guard is lowered.



2nd Bn, Lattakia: The Syrian flag is hoisted



2nd Bn, Iraq: “Brew-up” in the desert for Capt Hookway
and men of the Regtl Police



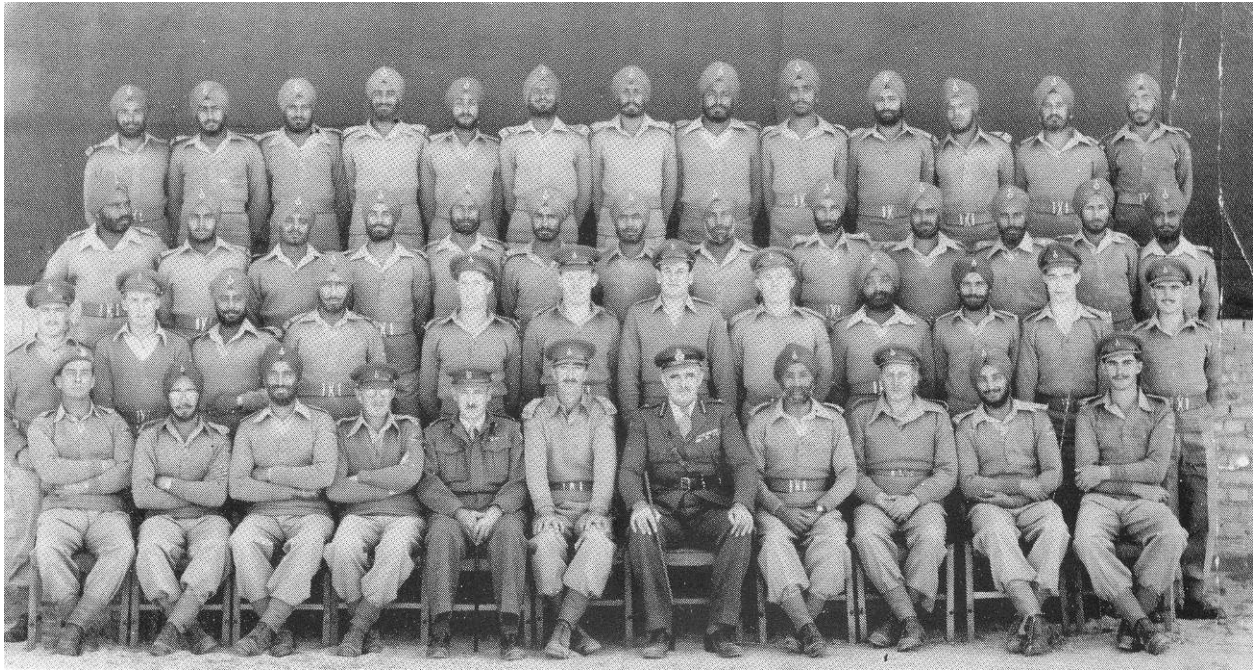
2nd Bn, Shaibah: Officers on a desert exercise
L to R: Lt Cooper, Lt Purdie, Lt Hodge, Lt Col Seagrim



2nd Bn, Shaibah: Jawans being briefed for a desert exercise



2nd Bn, Shaibah: FM Auchinleck, escorted by Lt Col Seagrim, inspects the Quarter Guard



2nd Bn, Shaibah:

Officers and VCOs with Maj Gen Loftus-Tottenham

Front row L to R: Maj Sterling, Maj Narrinder Singh, Maj Tara Singh, Maj Jenney, Brig Hamilton, Lt Col Seagrim (CO), Maj Gen Loftus-Tottenham (GOC), Sub Maj & Hon Capt Mall Singh, Maj Young, Maj Raghbir Singh Brar, Capt Hookway

2nd row: Lt Cooper, Capt Clarke, Jem Shamsheer Singh, Sub Hari Singh, Lt Shiner, Lt Purdie, Lt Hodge, Lt Rice, Sub Hernam Singh, Capt Mohinder Singh, Lt Leete, Capt Walters



London: Sikh Pioneers and Sikh LI Association, c. 1975
Presentation of Capt Hunt's medals to go back to India



London: 50th Anniversary Reunion, with trophies, 1991
L to R: Capt Routley, Capt Purdie, Capt Bennett, Capt Bromley, Maj
Lacey, Maj Watkin, Capt Rice, Capt Hookway, Maj Gillespie
Seated: Mrs Crosthwaite



Witney: Reunion, 1994

L to R: Capt Hookway, Capt Walters, Maj Gillespie, Capt Bromley,
Maj Lacey, Lt Dudley Capt Rice, Capt Routley



London: VJ Anniversary Parade, London, August 1995

L to R: Maj Gillespie, Capt Walters, Maj Watkin, Capt Hookway,
Capt Rice